

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Queen of the Night

by Kenneth Perkins

*A Riot of Romance
and Roguery*



10¢ PER
COPY

APRIL 14

BY THE
YEAR \$4.00



"AN OLD WOOD CUT"

Painted by Edward V. Brewer for Cream of Wheat Company Copyright 1923 by the Cream of Wheat Company

Men wanted a stick
with a man sized hold—

Here it is !



Notice the full length of soap
in the new Doublecap Stick.



—of course, it's Williams'

YOU can use both ends of this Doublecap Stick and you always have a whole-hand hold. When one end of the stick is worn down, begin on the other.

Without fuss or bother the soap left within the ring can be used up in connection with a Doublecap Re-Load. This Re-Load always costs less than the original Doublecap package.

You can insert the Doublecap Re-Load in a jiffy—no trouble at all. The handsome metal Doublecap container is absolutely non-corrosive, and will last indefinitely. If you are a stick user you want to try this one. See free offer below.

FREE

Use postcard or send this coupon for trial size Williams' Doublecap Shaving Stick. Its highly polished metal container is handsome enough to match even the finest silver toilet accessories.

*Made by the makers of the famous Williams' Holder
Top Stick and Williams' Shaving Cream.*

Williams'

Doublecap Stick "It's New!"

FOR FREE TRIAL SIZE DOUBLECAP STICK
The J. B. Williams Company,
Dept. 4, Glastonbury, Conn.

Send me the free sample of Williams' New Doublecap
Stick in highly polished metal container.

Name _____

Address _____

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CL

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NUMBER 5

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SOMETHING, natural or supernatural, enters the soul of Andrew Creel, a commonplace young man, and drives him into a swift game where death is a probability on the one side and love only a possibility on the other. He plays it to the end—an end unlike the end that seemed so sure when dusk fell on the garden of that charming mansion with its sinister residents. This unusual story is told in

THE DARKNESS AT WINDON MANOR—By Max Brand

A FOUR-PART SERIAL WHICH STARTS NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT 1923

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Hit the Trail to the Great Northwest— with Baree for your pal!

BAREE was half wolf, half dog. To his enemies in the trackless depths of the North Woods he was a devil—a killer—a savage outcast as cunning as he was fearless. But to those who knew and loved Baree, as Nepeese, the Indian maiden, did, he was the truest and finest friend in the world.

You too will love Baree. Your heart will go out to this wonderful dog of the wilds, with his superb courage and his undying loyalty.

Baree is waiting for you now—up in the great Northwest—waiting to be your pal,

waiting to go with you on thrilling adventures. Let James Oliver Curwood take you to him—let his vivid pen transport you to the heart of the magic Northwest. Baree was a real dog and when Curwood writes about him you feel you have known him and actually lived with him through the breathless days and nights of his thrilling career. Your sympathy warms to him in the early days of his puppyhood—a furry little outcast alone in the vast mystery of the forests, his hair bristling at the strange life about him.

There comes the night of the red moon, when the earth is whitening with a film of frost, when the wolf instinct in Baree's blood is tugging at his heart, when, raising his nose to the moon, he sends his answering cry to the wolf-pack ringing through the forests. What follows is an adventure that will fairly set you a-quiver.



"James Oliver Curwood" An amazing opportunity! Six wonderful volumes that transport you to the thrilling land of the Northwest—now yours at a sensational bargain

Here are stories to quicken your blood—stories that bring you a host of interesting friends from the animal world, stories pulsating with the romantic drama of red-blooded men and women.

A limited edition of this six volume Curwood set is now offered in a countrywide "quick-action" sale, at an unparalleled low price and on terms so convenient that the cost is hardly noticeable!

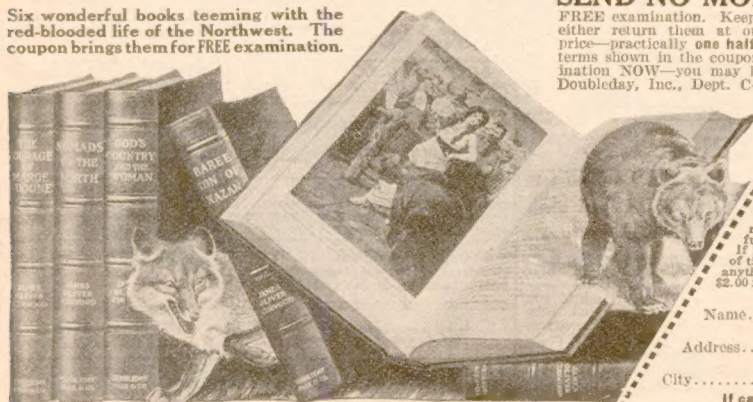
The six volumes are: "The Courage of Marge O'Doone," "Nomads of the North," "God's Country and the Woman," "Baree, Son of Kazan,"

Kazan," "The Grizzly King," "The Hunted Woman." Uniformly bound in dark maroon silk cloth, titles in gold, silk head and foot bands, profusely illustrated.

More than two million copies of Curwood's works have been sold; the screen dramatizations of his stories crowd our motion picture houses; everywhere there is an overwhelming demand for his enthralling tales. And now, here is the greatest opportunity ever offered to obtain the six volume Curwood set!

Six wonderful books teeming with the red-blooded life of the Northwest. The coupon brings them for FREE examination.

SEND NO MONEY Just mail the coupon. You will receive the six volumes for FREE examination. Keep the books for 7 full days. Then you can either return them at our expense or pay only the special low price—practically one half the regular price—on the amazingly easy terms shown in the coupon. But mail the coupon for FREE examination NOW—you may be too late if you wait. Address: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., Dept. C-184, Garden City, New York.



Nelson Doubleday, Inc.
Dept. C-184, Garden City, New York

Kindly send me the six volume set of James Oliver Curwood, bound in dark maroon cloth, with titles lettered in gold. I am to have the privilege of examining them for seven days and at the end of that time if I decide to keep them I will forward you \$1.50 and then send \$2.00 each month for three months, making a total of \$7.50 in full payment, which is almost half the regular price. If I wish to do so, I may return the set before the end of the examination period and then will not owe you anything. Bound in 3-4 leather, \$9.50—you just pay \$2.00 for one additional month.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

If cash is sent with order deduct 50c.



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising

Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$4.00
Argosy-Allstory	2.50	Less 25 cash discount
Weekly		
Minimum space four lines.		

May 19th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close April 21st

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN MAKE \$75.00 A WEEK selling our strictly All-Wool Made-to-Measure Suits all at one surprising low price. You collect profits in advance and keep them. We supply finest selling outfit in America. Many exclusive money-making features. Tailoring, raincoat and side-line men, part or full time, get in touch with us immediately. **PARK TAILORING COMPANY**, Dept. 619, Chicago, Ill.

Wanted—Financially responsible men of high calibre who can assume and direct the entire state or county sales for a new exceptional device of great utility. Our proposition enables you to sell Jobbers, Dealers or direct to autoists, factories, garages, farmers, mechanics, etc. Sawyer, state representative, makes \$1083.23 profit first month. Men who are accepted will be granted exclusive territory and are given active sales co-operation. Write to Sales Manager, **Park Metalware Co. Inc.**, Dept. 5, Orchard Park, N. Y.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 137 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; \$10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. **EVER-PLAY**, Desk 412, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS—CREW MANAGERS—SELL WONDERFUL NEW food product direct to homes. Joy-Jel makes all jelly "jell." Big profit-maker, instant seller, sure repeater, exclusive territory. Sample free. **Joy-Jel Company**, 835 Grand, St. Joseph, Mo.

EARN \$100.00 WEEKLY Selling Superfine Hosiery to men, women and children. Your pay in advance. We deliver. Exclusive Territory now open for capable men as district and state managers. **Donde Hosiery Co.**, Dept. A, 105 W. Monroe, Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. **LA DERMA CO.**, Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

Agents \$60—\$200 a week FREE SAMPLES Gold Sign Letters for Store Fronts and Office Windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand everywhere. Liberal offer to general agents. **METALLIC LETTER CO.**, 427 North Clark St., Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillyer Ragsdale**, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—C. T. A. prices reduced again. Suits \$18.00, made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Sample outfit free. Write **Chicago Tailors Ass'n**, World's largest tailors, Dept. 389, Station C, Chicago.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE \$10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. **A. D. Seed Filter Company**, 73 Franklin, New York.

Big Money, Quick Sales. Fine profits and steady demand selling **Clows-Knit** guaranteed hosiery direct from mill to wearers. All styles for men, women, children. Many making \$3000 year. **George Clows Co.**, Desk 42, Philadelphia.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. **Producers League**, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LANDSEEKERS! ATTENTION! \$10 to \$50 down starts you on 20, 40, or 80 acres; near thriving city in Mich.; bal. long time. Write today for big free booklet giving full information. **Swigart Land Co.**, Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

STAMPS—100 Different for 2c and collectors names. 10 Different Foreign Coins. 20c. 50 Austria-Hungary Stamps 5c. 20 Russia Stamps 10c. 30 Sweden Stamps 10c. Lists free. **TOLEDO STAMP COMPANY**, Dept. A, Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—MAKE BIG MONEY from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction—perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from \$75.00 to \$200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. **I. T. MAXWELL**, Sales Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago, Ill.

\$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS. Beginners can make \$100.00 weekly with my canvassing. **Spol**—experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. **PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN**, Dept. A, 673 Madison, Chicago.

TAILORING SALESMEN—Fastest selling line, suits, made to measure—\$29.50—one price, all wool. Profits in advance. Biggest old reliable house. **W. D. SMITH CO.**, established 1895, Dept. 21, Chicago.

OUR AGENTS MAKE \$35 TO \$50 DAILY and are getting it with new marvelous invention. Sells to everybody. Low price. Pocket outfit. Write **SUREN CO.**, 25 N. Dearborn St., Chicago.

Agents Sell Harper's Household Cleaning Set. Washes and dries windows, mops, scrubs, cleans walls, hangs paper, sweeps, etc. Complete Set sells for less than \$3. Over 100% profit. Can start without a cent. 107 A St., Fairfield, Ia.

TAILORING AGENTS: Our \$29.50 All Wool tailored to order suits and overcoats are \$20 cheaper than store prices. Commissions paid in advance. Protected territory. Beautiful assortment. 6x9 swatches free. **J. B. SIMPSON**, Dept. 554, 831 Adams St., Chicago.

HERE IT IS—Fifty Fast Sellers. Everybody needs and buys. Fifty dollars weekly easily made. **R. & G. RUBBER COMPANY**, Dept. 263, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

District Managers, Side Line Salesmen, Live Agents Earn Big Money. **Natex Products**, 9 big sellers, nationally advertised, sell on sight to merchants, housewives and motorists. Write for territory. **Natex Products Co.**, Dept. A, 2422 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

AGENTS:—Men and Women to take orders for **Dyx** Guaranteed Silk Hosiery sold direct from the mill to the wearer. Possibilities unlimited for making money. **DYX HOSIERY COMPANY**, 506 Lyric Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

\$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn \$30 to \$35 Extra Every Week, taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples today. **THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO.**, Dept. R-104, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. **CARNATION CO.**, Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell **Mendets**, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. **Collette Manufacturing Company**, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address **Authors' Press**, Dept. 19 Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit **Miss.**, or write **Literary Bureau**, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

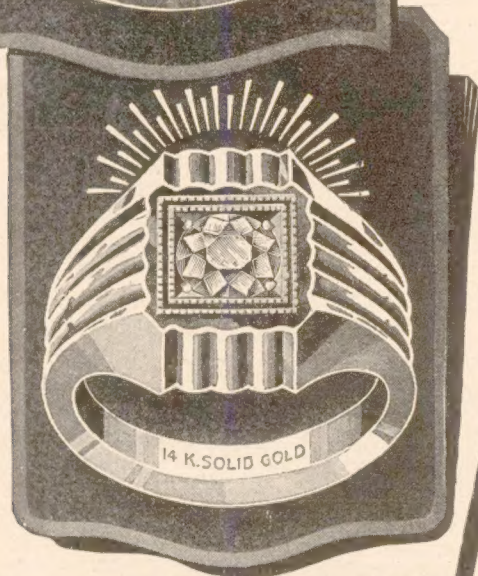
Cash for Old Gold, Platinum, Silver, Diamonds, Liberty Bonds, War, Thrift, Unused Postage Stamps, False Teeth, Magneto Points, Jobs, any valuables. Mail in today. Cash sent return mail. Goods returned in ten days if you are not satisfied. **Ohio Smelting Co.**, 301 Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

No Deposit

of Any Kind—
Send No Money
Pay No C.O.D.



Read every word of this amazing new offer—wear this Genuine Diamond Ring for a full week at our expense—deposit nothing—absolutely no risk or expense to you.

Mail free trial coupon below—do not enclose a penny. We will send you **on approval**, at our expense, all charges prepaid, your choice of these handsome genuine diamond rings. Pay nothing when the ring arrives—**make no deposit of any kind**. Wear the ring a week; show it to your friends; see if you can duplicate it for fifty dollars in the stores. Then, after a week, decide. If you wish to return the ring, do so at our expense and that settles everything. The trial is entirely free. **You pay nothing, so you can lose nothing.** But if you decide to keep the ring, just mail us \$3.75 a month until you have paid the amazingly low price of \$38.75. A year to pay—no interest.

Genuine Diamonds

The Ladies' Ring (upper illustration) is an elaborate pierced model executed in 14-K solid green gold, with an 18-K hand engraved and beaded white gold top. A striking new model. It is set with a large brilliant, blue-white, top quality, perfectly cut, genuine diamond—a remarkably big value, worth at least \$50.00 anywhere. Our price is only \$38.75, with a year to pay. (\$3.75 a month.)

The Men's Ring (lower illustration) is a handsome new fluted design, extra massive 14-K solid gold with an 18-K hand engraved and beaded white gold top. Set with a large brilliant, blue-white, top quality, perfectly cut, genuine diamond. Try to duplicate this ring for fifty dollars. Our price is only \$38.75, payable \$3.75 a month, a year to pay.

Mail this Coupon Now —
Enclose Ring Size
Send No Money
Pay No C.O.D.

Mail this Coupon

Harold Lachman Co., 204 S. Peoria Street
Dept. 2274 Chicago
Send me absolutely free and prepaid, for a week's trial, the GENUINE DIAMOND RING checked below. I enclose no money. I am to pay nothing when it arrives. At the end of one week I will either return the ring or else send you \$3.75 first payment and \$3.75 each month, until your cut price of \$38.75 is paid. Title remains with you until fully paid. I ENCLOSE MY FINGER SIZE.
☐ Ladies' Ring No. A4350 ☐ Men's Ring No. A4450

Name _____
Address _____
Age _____ Occupation _____

Worth \$50 Price Cut to **\$38.75**
Genuine Diamonds

Mail the Coupon for Free Trial

Copyright 1922, Harold Lachman Co.

Sale of Paisley Crepe Dresses

Paisley \$98
Flowered
Blouse
ONLY **3**

No description, no picture, can fully do justice to this beautiful two-tone PAISLEY CREPE dress. You must see it, try it on right in your own home, to fully realize its beauty, its charm and quality. Beautiful all-around ruffled Bertha Collar of fairy-like Voile Crepe adds to its lovely lines besides the exquisite two-tone Oriental colored blouse of Paisley Flowered Crepe. Newest long-waisted style. Designed in straight, conservative fashion; bell shaped sleeves, and beautiful long flowing Paisley sash, which ties at the front.

SENT ON APPROVAL

Get this wonderful bargain on approval. Rush in your order and we will ship immediately. Send no money under our Money-Back Guarantee of satisfaction.

Remember! Your Name Only

Brings this beautiful dress to you at once. Suitable for evening and street wear. Graces any figure. Of the newest material of the season—and for less money. This value not to be confused with cheaper dresses advertised at the same price. Give your name, address, size and color. Pay postman only our bargain price of \$3.98, plus a few cents postage. Money back at once if not delighted. Sizes 32 to 46 inch bust. Misses' Sizes: 14 to 22 years. Colors: Copenhagen Blue, Rose, Lavender, Tangerine with Paisley blouse, sleeves, sash.

INTERNATIONAL MAIL ORDER COMPANY
Dept. P-742, Chicago, Illinois.



Newest
Style
Newest
Material

Do You Want
\$2000.00
Then write quick for our new offer. We want men and women to introduce 350 Zanol Products in every territory. Permanent business. Cash profits.
Your Spare Time

will start you in business for yourself. No experience needed. No capital required. We furnish instructions and equipment including automobile. Write today for our offer.



AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.
Dept. 8549, Cincinnati, Ohio.

\$20 A DAY
Selling Shirts
Large shirt manufacturer wants agents to sell complete line of shirts, pajamas, and nightshirts direct to wearer. Advertised brand—exclusive patterns—easy to sell. No experience or capital required. Entirely new proposition. Write for free samples.
Madison Shirt Co., 503 Broadway, N.Y.C.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

HERE'S A BUSINESS—Requires only table room. We start and help build business. Work for us painting Landscape photo print pictures. No experience, outfit furnished. Free literature. TANGLEY COMPANY, 193 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market Street, Philadelphia.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilson Methods Ltd., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

Get Government Jobs. Become Railway Mail Clerks—City Carriers—\$1400—\$2300 year. Steady. Common education sufficient. Free particulars. Write immediately. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. R-1, Rochester, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

EARN \$110 TO \$250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITION GUARANTEED AFTER 3 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

MEN OVER 18. Make secret investigations and reports. Salary—expenses. For particulars outlining guaranteed positions write J. GANOR, Former Government Detective, Dept. G, St. Louis.

BECOME A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT! Big salaries, fascinating work. Landscapers needed everywhere! We tell you how. LANDSCAPERS, 425 Union League Building, Los Angeles, California.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WE PAY BIG MONEY FOR PAINTING PILLOW TOPS AND LAMP SHADES. SIMPLE, EASY, QUICK. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, FT. WAYNE, IND.

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO \$400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID, IN HOTEL WORK. SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINED MEN AND WOMEN—MANY OPENINGS. WE HAVE MORE THAN WE CAN FILL. \$0.0000 HOTEL POSITIONS TO BE FILLED THE COMING YEAR. WE TRAIN YOU AT HOME. SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book. "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. RANDOLPH & CO., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 624 F ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE A SONG. ANY SUBJECT. YOU CAN DO IT. SEND WORDS TODAY. I WILL COMPOSE THE MUSIC. FRANK RADNER, 6048 PRAIRIE AVE., DEPT. 651, CHICAGO.

POEMS WANTED—Sell your song-verses for cash. Submit Mss. at once or write NEW ERA MUSIC COMPANY, 122, St. Louis, Mo.

SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best proposition to offer you. Act now and be convinced. RAY HIBBELE, D-147, 4040 Dickens Ave., Chicago.

WANTED TO BUY

Mail Us Your Discarded Jewelry, Gold Crowns and Bridges, Watches, Diamonds, Silver, Platinum, War Saving Stamps and Old False Teeth. Money sent by return mail. Packages held 4 to 12 days and returned if our offer is refused. United States Smelting Works (The Old Reliable), Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.

How "Modest Jim" Won the \$50 Prize

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE

Author of "The Awakening"

"YES—I remember why they call the Big Boss 'Modest Jim,'" said the Old Timer. "It started way back twenty years ago.

"I was in my third apprentice year when Jim Hadley came to work here—a quiet, bashful boy. His father had died and he was forced to leave grammar school and go to work.

"He was never among the groups of boys dodging the boss or watching the clock nor mixed up in anything that wasn't strictly business. And he never fooled away his time with the bunch after hours, so we left him pretty much to himself. We called him 'Modest Jim.'

"One day Old Man Adams, who owned this outfit in those days, came out into the shop and tacked up a sign over the foreman's desk.

"It seemed that the Old Man and his designer had run into a stone wall or what was Greek to most of us kids those days, and was offering a prize of fifty dollars to anyone who solved the problem. He must have been up against it or he never would have asked our bunch for help.

"About two weeks later, after the rest of us had forgotten all about it, the Old Man rushed out to Jim and fairly pushed five crisp ten dollar bills into his hand. He had solved the problem.

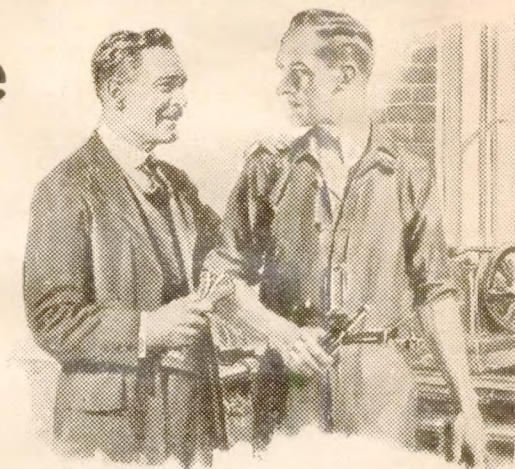
"When the foreman asked him how he did it, he replied, 'Oh, it wasn't anything great. Only a fresh brain on a stale subject.' That's all he ever said about it. But do you know what that boy had been doing? He'd been studying with the International Correspondence Schools in his spare time. No wonder he got ahead!

"And he went right up, and up and up, until today he is the Big Boss. And the rest of us are just about where we started. He's still 'Modest Jim,' but he's earning five times as much as I am.

"Take my advice, lad, and follow along in Jim's footsteps. Don't wait until it's too late to get the special training that is so essential to success."

Employers everywhere are looking for men like "Modest Jim"—men who want to get ahead—who are willing to devote a part of their spare time to training for advancement.

How much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you a better job and more money?



Isn't it better to make your start now than to wait a year or five years and then wish you had? It certainly is!

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. lessons make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. courses will surely suit your needs.

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 2186-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Better Letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Trade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Banking Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy (including C.P.A.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nicholson Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects |
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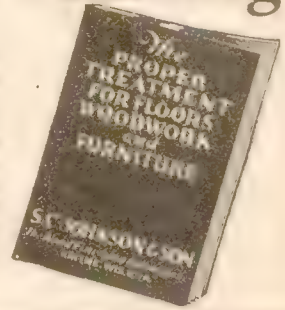
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CL

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 1923

NUMBER 5

WIZARDRY OF KENNETH PERKINS

*This gifted writer of vivid action stories scores another success with **QUEEN OF THE NIGHT**, the first installment of which we present in this issue of the Argosy-Allstory Weekly.—Here is a gorgeous drama flashing across the dark sky of monotony to thrill the reader's imagination as if his physical eye had viewed a new comet in the starry heavens.—Breath-taking are the happenings between dusk and dawn.*

KENNETH PERKINS is a wizard in character delineation, natural dialogue and logical situations. His writing always has the savor of verisimilitude and the charm of proportion.

Only deep concentration in his art can make an author convincing, and here is one whose tales are rich with authenticity. When he describes the actions of a heroine or a hero they do more than gesture like puppets. They truly exist. The girl radiates beauty. The man is inspiring.

This faculty of making his characters step out of the written page to live and breathe and act for the reader has made notable all of Mr. Perkins's stories. And the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY has been the exclusive medium in presenting his work to a discriminating public interested in fiction of the first class.

First came **THE BULL-DOGGER**, appearing in the issues of November 5 to November 26, 1921. In this swift and colorful Western tale Joe Winborne, cow-puncher, faces Dan McGraw, Arizona cattle king, in the primal conflict of man against man for the possession of a woman. She is Posey Donnel, daughter of the rancher for whom Winborne is foreman. Girl-like, Posey at first did not know her own mind, but when McGraw stages a bull-dogging contest, where his own bull gores to death a Mexican Indian *vaquero*, she realizes the innate savagery of the cattle king. Winborne becomes the hero of the rodeo when he tackles the raging animal and by strength and skill brings it plunging to the dust. After that, Posey and Joe see that anything separating them is an obstacle to happiness and must be overleaped.

Next was **THE BLOOD-CALL**, January 14 to February 4, 1922. This, too, is a stirring, galloping romance of the West. Jim Quade is taught by his grandmother, Bess Quade, to become a skillful, two-fisted fighter and an expert with the six-gun. He now has reached maturity, and the aged woman informs him that his brother long ago had been murdered by Smoo Taurog, cattle-rustler, bad man, killer. Young Quade follows the blood-call of vengeance into the enemy's territory. Here he fulfills the prayer of his warlike granddame, outgaming and overcoming the bandit in the very jaws of death. Jim's reward is more than the satisfaction of a vendetta. Beautiful Kirbie, foster daughter of the killer, loses her heart to him.

The third novel was **THE FEAR-SWAY**, April 29 to May 27, 1922. Again

Mr. Perkins chose the West as the theater for a story of thrills, romance, surprise and ingenuity. Tom Drury, cowboy, tames a man-killing horse named Crater and thereby prevents its public execution. Its owner, Jennie Lee, granddaughter of Peter Gaunt, gives the animal to the daring rider. Then Drury rides away into the desert to punish an outlaw known as the Gila Monster, who had driven the aged man and the beautiful girl from their ranch. He wages a desperate battle against the bandit gang, his greatest handicap being the reign of terror that its members have inaugurated in the sparsely settled country. The Gila Monster is finally destroyed, the instrument of death being the furious horse, Crater, which objected to a stranger in the saddle. Jennie and Tom now acknowledge only the sway of love.

The fourth Western story was *THE GUN-FANNER*, June 10 to July 1, 1922. Cal Triggers, a killer, enters as a contestant in a rodeo where the prize is more than gold, and the result is gun-play and high adventure. Old Scrub Hazen's beautiful ward, Nan, is a romantic girl, and he plans to marry her off to Saul Meakin in a winner-takes-the-woman contest. The wily guardian, of course, chooses a program of events in which Meakin is expert. The appearance in town of the formidable Triggers is a shock, but the girl gamely orders the rodeo to proceed. After Triggers wins, however, she refuses to accept him. Undaunted, he abducts her from the ranch-house and carries her off to the desert, where she discovers that a despised desperado can be a true gentleman. After that, all the sheriffs' posses in the world could not change the course of events from leading to wedding bells. Tom Mix appeared in the screen version of the story as the renegade hero.

THE BELOVED BRUTE appeared August 12 to September 16, 1922. This powerful novel depicted the regeneration of a man so sodden with the lust of fighting that he is hardly human. Charles Hinges, a gigantic youth of wild repute, is cursed by his dying father who leaves a blessing to his younger son, David, and a prophecy that his favorite some day will conquer the lawless brother. In the Bad Lands town of Little Hell the surly giant is inspired by an aged fortune-telling witch to rescue Jacinta, a dance hall girl, from the clutches of China Jones, a half-breed, and his gang. Then the three become gypsy troubadours, and here begin the adventures through which Charles Hinges wins the salvation of his soul. Finally, David Hinges appears and accepts the defiance of the unknown Charles the Wrestler to a match. The younger brother wins after a terrific effort, but without knowing he has thrown his own brother. The defeated one fears that he has lost the love of Jacinta, but in the end his self-sacrifice in a deadly emergency is more potent to hold her than the sheer strength of his great muscles.

JUNGLE TEST, January 13 to February 10, 1923, is a story of India dealing with the tradition that the jungle passes judgment on all men who come under its influence. It cows many, and crushes some, and few come through its green menace unscathed. (Mr. Perkins, incidentally, was born in India, the son of American parents. He was graduated from Pomona College, Claremont, California, where he became an instructor in English and taught in extension courses.) In this absorbing novel Diane Herries, an American girl on a trip around the world, is carried off from a little village by an apelike dwarf of the jungle. Her fiancé, Ian Dunboyne, hires a native as guide and sets out to rescue her. The trail leads him to his sweetheart and he frees her and captures the dwarf, but the jungle is not yet through with them. When the time of trial comes, Dunboyne falters miserably. His guide then reveals himself as James Belleu, of the Indian Civil Service. No longer is he a make-believe native, but a white man in pride and bearing, and he compels the jungle lords to acknowledge his superiority. Diane Herries accepts the verdict of rajah and elephant and cobra, and chooses Belleu instead of Dunboyne as her mate.

QUEEN OF THE NIGHT, starting in this number of the *ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY*, is a flashing, dashing romance. Out of a dead man's sea chest three wild mariners take golden treasure --and more trouble than the money was worth. There is a tigerlike girl, Juana. El Gato, once a fighter of bulls, is a mad brawler among men. So here are the metals for a typical Kenneth Perkins novel, gold and cold steel and the quicksilver of emotion. Turn now to the immediate grip of the opening chapter.



Queen of the Night

By **KENNETH PERKINS**

Author of "Jungle Test," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE TRIO.

FLAXTOW BAYOU was navigable for deep sea vessels a good thirty miles inland. They could haul in under the lee of a pile dike and, by a constant use of the lead, navigate the ship channel, five fathoms in depth, now sandy ground, now ooze.

Barges, with their lading of bales of cotton or sacks of wheat flour, had plenty of water. Freighters had not. When they steamed up into the foul reaches beyond tidewater they were apt to find themselves horsed up on mud lumps. There were plenty of these in Flaxtow Bayou—some of them dry for a whole season before flood-time. Pelicans used them then for breeding grounds which looked like fields of cotton because of the fluffy white fledglings.

The channel itself was a long strip of steamy, stench-ridden water. Foul mists

rose in feathery wreaths, enveloping the masts and stays of the freighters and mingling in with the black smoke of their stacks. On either side of the water was a rich, almost tropical, verdure of sycamores, pepperwoods, banana trees and swamp palmettos.

Into this scene came a rusty, red stained, weed slimed iron hulk called the Orinoco. Out of ballast she was a gaunt, narrow-bowed tramp, with a good fathom showing between the water line and the yellow surface of the channel. Brine and barnacles mottled her hull, her paint was blistered, bleached yellow in vertical lines from scuppers and hawseholes. The one stack, scaling off its paint, belched a black cloud into the still air which mounted in a slow vertical whorl. The fainter copper colored mists of the channel wreathed about this mass of smoke like vine tendrils about an oak trunk.

In that silent deserted berthage the ship

emitted the only audible sounds. Its bow anchors—masses of rusty iron—splashed loudly into the muddy water, a roar of chain going through the hawseholes. Men shouted and bawled at each other; the mate's oaths pierced the air; a macaw, flapping its crimson and gold wings, cackled out oaths from the forecastle deck.

The steamship *Orinoco* anchored just below a puddle of yellow soupy water which is called a turning-basin. On shore at this point there were some deserted wharves, shaded by sycamores and willows. A road was bordered with negro saloons, a sorghum patch, and a cottonseed oil mill.

In a particularly lonely part of the road, under the shadow of the freighter herself, there was a tavern. Its adobe walls and tiled dilapidated roof were well hidden in a grove of palm and banana trees. The leaves of the latter, the size of elephant's ears, completely shut out the sunlight, so that the place had that moldy rotten appearance of a house that is never properly dried after a rain. Its walls were discolored by water and the adobe was broken off in patches showing the rude brick work beneath.

Over the ugly squat façade there was the tracery of light brown earth where the ants built their roads. In the eaves, the lighter, yellower mud of the wasps' citadels was massed, making protuberances on the face of the lodging house like a skin disease.

Closed shutters and a gallery with elaborate grille work for a railing suggested the Creole houses of New Orleans—a compromise with the distinctly Spanish adobe type the house had been originally. Its present owner had added his touch by hanging a binnacle lamp over the arched doorway which called one's attention to the sign of the tavern written out with cordage nailed to a board: "The Sundown Café."

To this place came three mariners from the tramper *Orinoco*.

The first was Captain Jarvy, a thickset man with red neck and a square jowled face covered with gray stubble. A suit of damp bedraggled whites clung to his massive bones. Black hair grew on chunky fists. A Spanish galleon tattooed on the back of his hand had spread, with the

coarsening of his skin, to a purplish blot like a birthmark.

One of his companions was the mate, Mr. Grimpen, a tall but stoop-shouldered man with ungainly arms and long legs. He wore a black skull cap with a leather vizor, a blue coat tarred, greased and painted, and a pair of denim pants that might have been overalls. Bare ankles showed between the frayed, wide-flaring trouser legs and the canvas shoes. Around his waist he wore a peculiar leather belt fully six inches in width, trussing up a meager stomach. He was a suave feline man with a springy step, who, if he had worn earrings behind his mouse colored sideburns, would have looked like a buccaneer.

Behind these two officers of the tramp steamer walked the boatswain, Tom Yarre. He wore a short double breasted jacket, which he left open, displaying a magnificent nude torso. Across his cheekbone was a fresh scar, and from ear to throat another not yet turned from purple to white. His eyes were a clear, piercing gray, his bare throat and neck deeply tanned from the sun and wind. He wore a pair of limp sea-boots with their tops collapsed and fallen down midway on his shins.

Under his arm he carried a chest, the leather eaten away, the iron binding rusted. It was enough for two men to pack, particularly if the contents were known. Tom Yarre carried it as a schoolboy will carry a load of books under his arm.

When the proprietor of the Sundown Café saw this trio enter the vestibule of his lodging house and go to the registration desk—which had at one time been a bar—his face took on a very serious expression.

"We want a room!" the skipper ordered. "And from now until your dinner we are not to be disturbed. Savee? All righto. Get goin'. No, the bos'n will keep holt of his sea chest. He can carry it as well as you, my host."

Herzog managed to stammer out an ingratiating remark:

"I see you gents are from this here freighter. A good lookin' ship in her way. It ain't often we get a glimpse of the big sea-goin' ships here. Where do you hail from, skipper?"

"From a hurricane, be gad!" Captain Jarvy snapped. "Unless you're axin' for to see my clearance papers!"

"Ah! No! But it ain't generally axin' too much to find out where a ship's called at."

"Well, our last port of call, Mr. 'Ost, was the Spanish Main. Put that down in your register if you like."

The mate and the boatswain exchanged mute glances of surprise. Their master was in a strange mood.

"The Spanish Main, skipper?" the innkeeper said, scratching his bald head. "Where's that at?"

"The Caribbean Sea, Puerto Cortes, Belize, Barranquilla. Ain't that the Spanish Main, mates?"

The boatswain and Mr. Grimpen burst out laughing at their master's pleasantry:

"It sure was what they called it in the old days, skipper!"

Again the innkeeper scratched his moist head. "I'll tell you gents," he began humbly. "I hate to refuse lodging to—"

"You're sayin' you're loaded up?" the skipper shouted so loudly that Herzog shrank back as if fearing a blow. He changed his tone.

"No, sir, no I ain't sayin' I'm loaded up. Not exactly. Though where I'm goin' to put *three* of you, I—you see if it was only one—that is—"

"We want one room—no matter about the bunks—one room, mine host, unless—" the skipper softened his voice, but for some reason it seemed much more compelling, "unless you want to stand there before our face and tell us as how you won't mix with gents that puts down a hurricane as their address!"

The innkeeper paused before answering, with a very definite realization of the threat couched in this speech. His yellow face turned wet as he looked, bewildered, from the tall boatswain to the sneaky, pale-eyed, smiling Mr. Grimpen. He looked to them as if for refuge; he was mortally afraid of catching the skipper's eye.

The boatswain's clear gray eyes, the only human touch in the three faces, gave him courage; the little man was finally able to modulate his voice and announce calmly:

"Come along, mates. I'll show you a room up in the eaves of the house. What you say or do there can never be heard nor seen."

CHAPTER II.

A DIVISION—AND TROUBLE.

THE skipper and his mate and man were shown into an upstairs room of the lodging house. Herzog, the proprietor, stayed on the threshold rubbing his clammy hands, balancing himself on his feet as if prepared to jump backward at any moment. He stood there, his face wrinkled with every mark of suspicion, alarm, irresolution, until the door was closed upon him. The three mariners, having barred it, gathered about a table on which Tom Yarre had placed his sea chest, and from then on acted on the correct supposition that the proprietor was listening at the keyhole.

The window was shuttered and a lamp on the table turned up until its ragged wick smoked. The amber light clung about it—a dim halo hazy with mosquitoes, flying ants and moths.

Without any preliminary remarks the skipper opened the chest, while Mr. Grimpen, the suave and complacent mate, seated himself at one end of the table, folded his arms, smiled and all but purred like a cat watching its master pour out a bowl of cream. Tom Yarre, the boatswain, remained standing, his cap brushing the cobwebs of the ceiling, his head in the dark except for the spark of a black Porto Rican cheroot and a gleam of yellow light on his full throat and its scar.

The first view of the open chest displayed a flash of crimson shawls, silks, serapes and Spanish lace mantillas. The colors were so resplendent that it seemed as if they reflected the rays of the lamp upward, casting a flush over the greedy faces of Captain Jarvy and the purring Mr. Grimpen. The young boatswain could scarcely be expected to show any enthusiasm; shawls and serapes, to his way of thinking, were worthless antiquities.

Captain Jarvy stuck his hairy paw into this mesh of silk and embroideries and

tossed it aside. Mr. Grimpen extracted a handful of exquisite old lace from the heap—a *rebozo* fit for the head of some Spanish *infanta*—and cast it over the door knob behind him so as to veil the keyhole.

Satisfying himself now that his actions were known to his two companions only, Captain Jarvy shoveled his big hand into the chest again. It came palm upward, holding a pile of coins—silver bolivars from Venezuela, five-peso gold pieces, glittering yellow balboas from Panama, gold argentes, escudos. The sight was glorious, bringing a flash to the skipper's red eyes as well as to the pale blue eyes of Mr. Grimpen. Tom Yarre still stood up, aloof.

"Escudos, be gad!" the sea captain cried in a hoarse whisper. "And damned if there ain't condors among 'em, too!"

The skipper's hand trembled—something unusual for him—as he looked at what he held. One of the gold condors fell from it, jingling.

"Sh! Steady there, captain!" Mr. Grimpen cautioned. "Don't let 'em know abaht this money. These lodging 'ouses, y'know—"

The skipper spread out a silk serape to deaden the sound of the silver which he poured on the table. The three men stopped their heavy breathing as he shoveled out another handful of coins and poured them on the silk. When it jingled softly to a pile the men were aware again of their heavy breathing; of the loud buzz of winged ants; of the dull soft thud of a moth banging against the lamp chimney; of the whir of a bat up around Tom Yarre's head.

Then all sounds—or so at least it seemed—were suspended as another handful of silver jingled softly and merrily upon the silk. Other sounds seemed hushed because that one musical tinkle drowned everything else.

When the last handful of coins was scooped out, the skipper turned the chest upside down, emptying it of dirt, chaff and little woolly balls of dust. In the heap of silver and gold coins there were a few crude jewels of an antique sort, which blazed with a somber garnet light. These were poked into a separate pile. The skipper then proceeded to build little towers with the coins,

putting each according to its size, then measuring the little piles as a poker player takes a rough measurement of his chips.

The mate, Mr. Grimpen, rested his thin long chin upon his folded arms so that his eyes were on a level with the glittering piles. He watched the proceedings, his head crouched, his pale eyes slanting upward and showing a large amount of the bulging, veined whites. He was precisely like an animal poking its nose over the edge of the table and watching its master at dinner. Breathing through his long pitted nose, Mr. Grimpen sounded as if he were purring.

The vertical bars of coins were eventually gathered in two heaps.

"This here is mine," the skipper decreed. "That"—shoving over the pile to Mr. Grimpen—"is yours."

The two men proceeded to pocket their coins—the skipper stuffing his into a wallet, the mate pouring his into a small gunny-bag which he made fast to the broad leather belt about his waist.

Tom Yarre watched this part of the scene with a quiet scorn. The other two were aware of a heavier breathing on the part of the big boatswain, and they felt that a pair of burning gray eyes were focused upon their backs. It was uncomfortable—particularly for the mate, who was the nearest to him.

Finally the boatswain took his cheroot out of his mouth and burst out:

"Say, look here, captain, I understood as how the contents of that chest was to be divided in three equal parts—those were the stoker's dying words—'equal parts,' he said, 'not forgetting my old friend, Tom Yarre, the bos'n!'"

"There you go. I knew it! He's going to whine!" the skipper snorted. "I ain't fair, am I? I ain't got the right to divide this stuff like I want to, have I? I'm a cheatin', lyin' swobheaded grafter, ain't I? Look here, Mr. Grimpen," he said, turning to the mate, "I'll put it up to you. Am I fair? Am I just? Has this young sea-calf got any call to object to my methods?"

"Sh!" the mate cautioned, putting a long gnarled finger to his lips. "Let's have no fightin' abaht it. Of course, you're fair, skipper. You allus was fair. You deserve

'arf the money and I'll stand by your word. As for the bos'n, who's young and 'ot'headed, mebbe it's best we explain to him in simple plain terms of one syllable."

Mr. Grimpen turned to Tom Yarre and spoke in a tone that was a mixture of sarcasm and pity:

"Nah then, bos'n, you remember that our stoker kicked off when we was rangin' up the coast. Y' understand likewise that in his effects is a sea-chest, which was give to him by some blahsted robber down in Yucatan to pay orf a gamblin' debt. Y' understand, too, bos'n, that the stoker bequeathed this here chest to me and you and the skipper, warnin' us not to open it on board our good ship, nor yet in any port south of the Tropic of Cancer—because, says he, there was stuff in it as would get us into trouble. As he announced when he lay dyin', this 'ere chest was obtained by the sheddin' of much blood."

The mate smiled condescendingly as he concluded. "Nah then! Let's have no more blahsted truckin' over a 'andful of pesos. The skipper 'ere was appointed the executor. The stoker made that clear. 'It's a mess o' stuff,' he said, 'and leave his nobs the skipper divide it among the three of you.'"

"So this is what you call dividin' it?" Tom Yarre cried angrily.

"Am I just, or am I grafter?" Captain Jarvy roared again with the obvious desire that Tom Yarre would give him an opening for a good fight.

"Hush! Hush!" Mate Grimpen warned desperately.

Tom snapped back: "You're both double-crossing me, bein' you're my officers. It's plain rotten thievery—that's what it is! That stoker was my friend. He told me I was the best friend he ever had. He said those words when he was in his bunk sick, knowin' he'd never smell grass again. He would remember me, he swore, when he was stokin' coal down in hell! Be God, I hope he sees how I'm gettin' stuck on this deal! And he'll straighten it out, damn me!"

The skipper would stand no more.

"You're a kid, Yarre, or I'd have put you under hatches for this talk. Now shut

up, take what I'm givin' you, and clap down your rotten ole teeth. Here!"

He gathered up the shawls, serapes, jade combs, silver bracelets, and stuffed them into Yarre's arms. "They are yours to have and to hold. Now cork up, take your valuables and go below."

The boatswain untangled his arms from the filmy mass of scarlet and yellow.

"What do I want of this stinkin', moth-eaten stuff, skipper? Valuables you call it? A bunch of blowsy rags that haven't been worn for a hundred years. What's it for—but to give to some painted fool of a woman? I have no woman, and if I had, would she be seen in anything one winter old, let alone a century? Hell, no! They want the style month to month—not something worn when Cortez came to Mexico. Take this truck, wrap it around your fat, sweatin' carcass, and be damned!"

He rolled the embroidered satins, the Spanish lace and shawls into a bunch, and hurled it into the faces of his two officers. A golden scarf unwound, a shawl of lavender and emblazoned coats of arms ballooned out and descended upon Mr. Grimpen's head. The skipper's upraised fist, beating the air, was clothed in ancient lace. When he emerged, cursing, spitting, choking, Tom Yarre had gone below.

CHAPTER III.

JUANA TAKES HER TIME.

WHEN the three mariners walked into the dining room to sit down to Butch Herzog's Creole table d'hôte, the boatswain took a separate table.

It was a long, dark room, with sweating walls and a low ceiling. The rafters had been ravaged by ants. The ceiling, too, was traced by little roads fortified with red mud which the ants had constructed. They had eaten their trenches into the oak table, an antique transported from a Spanish mission or the hacienda of some grandee. A hanging lamp, with a wide reflector cutting off its illumination sharply from the upper half of the room, cast a dim light as far as the walls, the ant corridors, and a mottled painting of a toreador flagging a bull.

Inasmuch as Butch Herzog made use of this room later in the evening for his gambling, the windows were closely shuttered and barred with iron grille work. They imprisoned the foul warm air, to which Tom Yarre, fuming angrily with his stubby cheroot, added his customary aura of smoke.

Butch Herzog fled to the sanctuary of the kitchen, bewailing the fact that he could not get rid of these strange guests.

"There will be a murder in this house," he cried desperately. "There is no doubt of it. It's in the air. I smell it, I feel it! It hangs over us like a black cloud!"

Indeed the black cloud of smoke from the Orinoco's stack hovered ominously over the lodging house, and the proprietor felt himself in the clutches of the great freighter, as if it had been some iron monster crouched at his very door.

"Be careful how you treat them," Herzog advised the girl who served the guests of the Sundown Café. "These men are strange men. They have sailed from what ports no one knows. Their ship is a strange and villainous looking ship. She has seen storms—perhaps fights.

"One of the sailors is marked with scars that curdle my blood. And the skipper is a terrifying man to behold; he has red eyes and broken teeth and fists that are always doubled. Be careful, Juana, when you approach him, that you don't offend him, for like as not he will order his men to tear this house down about my ears."

"Let him put his fists upon me, Juana, the daughter of Miguel!" the girl said. "Pirates—eh? Pouf! I should like to see Señor Pirate touch my hand!"

Herzog shook his head in despair, but then, thinking over the situation, he felt that perhaps it was just as well Juana objected to the guests striking up an acquaintance with her. The proprietor had found out in days past that ladies who desired to attract the attention of the guests of the Sundown Café were often the cause of very disagreeable brawls.

"Very well, Juana," he said, "be yourself. But for God's sake do not offend that skipper. We must treat them as gentlemen and make them welcome. Then they will go away, perhaps, without slicing the

gizzards out of us all—you, myself, the cook, my wife."

Juana seemed to regard her entrance into what had been described as a den of pirates as nothing to get excited about. She shuffled in, her ragged shoes scuffling up the sawdust of the floor, her big black eyes glowering sulkily at first one guest, then the other, and finally at the man sitting alone. To her they might have been three hogs waiting for food.

The skipper and Mr. Grimpen, although both quite impressionable when coming ashore after a voyage and finding themselves in the presence of women, were very discriminating in their choice. Juana was a servant girl, and hence belonged to the lower stratum—the stratum on shore which corresponded to the forecabin on board ship.

The middle-aged Captain Jarvy was very discerning, particularly when it came to clothes. He gave the kitchen wench a rapid, disgusted look from her tousled black hair down to her cotton stockings and ragged shoes. That was enough.

"Bring me an enchilada!" he snapped, and turned to the mate to resume his conversation.

Mr. Grimpen, mate of the Orinoco, was perhaps something more of a ladies' man. But he, too, desired certain fundamental requisites. The girl must have red lips, brilliantly rouged cheeks, white arms and shoulders—not that disreputable copper color so common in the ports where the Orinoco had touched for many months past—that copper color which was the best word to describe Juana's complexion. She appeared to be not only a wench, but a greaser as well.

"Chile and beans will start me orf, me gel," was his comment.

The girl—perhaps naturally—interested in a very vital way Tom Yarre, who was only a boatswain. His order was a tamale, and when she brought it to him he watched the slender olive-colored hand take a knife and cut the strings about the husks. There was a deft grace in the way Juana handled a knife. When the boatswain saw the hand it appealed to him in a curious way. The strings of those tamale husks might have

been some tendon or nerve of a human being—of Tom Yarre himself. The hand thrilled him—it was beautiful.

He looked up, his eye following the bare moist arm of the girl to her shoulder where a sleeve of her blouse was torn, displaying the skin. Copper-colored skin was exquisite in the world of the forecastle. The blouse was not. It was of red stuff, dingy and old. The skin gleaming in the tear at the girl's shoulder and throat invited the mariner to look up. She was tall. Her face seemed far above him, aloof, dejected, sullen, proud.

The boatswain was young, and cared more for a girl's eyes than for her costume. These eyes, indeed, puzzled him greatly. They were large, dry, deep brown, as if smoldering from a vivid flame. There was a strange beauty about her which was not to be discovered by the inhabitants of the Sundown Café—the seamen, the Portuguese, Spanish, South American, the scruffers, the stevedores, the bargemen. Tom Yarre discovered it. She was like a Spanish infanta abducted by gypsies and transformed into a drudge. She was Cinderella.

A loud banging of Captain Jarvy's fist upon the table on the other side of the room summoned Juana away from the boatswain.

"Look here, woman," the skipper shouted, "I want them tarts of mine cooked like the way they do in Peru. Put the chile and meat on top and then furl the ole tart around it; clew it up with a bit of twine, and bake it with the meat stowed away in the bunt—"

"Santa Maria, what language is it you spik!" Juana cried desperately.

Mr. Grimpen interpreted his master's order in a soft, wheedling voice:

"The capting wants a torta rolled 'round some meat, well done. That's all, me gel. Now, abaht your business!"

"Señor Skipper don't want a tart; he wants a tamale," Juana cried disgustedly.

It was, of course, inevitable that the innkeeper should stand at the door with his ear cocked for every word spoken in the dining room. Having ordered the tortas cooked to the skipper's order, he again sent Juana into the "pirates' den."

"Humor him, woman!" Herzog begged. "Whatever he wants, let him have it—and more. There's no telling what disasters will come upon the house if we displease this terrible man!"

The mate was already eagerly devouring his chile and beans. And Tom Yarre, on the other side of the room, had set upon his tamale with a merciless appetite. The skipper alone was unserved, goaded by hunger, tapping the floor with his boot and letting fly a kick at a pigeon which was picking at the sawdust under the table.

Juana set his dish before him. He picked it up, looked at it, smelled it, making a snorting noise with his nose.

"What the hell is this?"

"Damn if I know, *señor*," was Juana's retort.

"I ordered tortas—and you bring me something in a husk! Am I a pig? Do you feed husks to a man who has eaten this dish in every port from Suez to 'Frisco? God! Woman, what is this cesspool of Mexicans and cockroaches that invites seamen to eat a table d'hôte!"

"Before God, I am not Mexican!" the girl cried. "I am Spanish. I am Castilian! I am Juana, the daughter of Miguel."

This quarrel brought the innkeeper, pale-faced and trembling, to the door—as well as the cook and the innkeeper's wife.

The skipper's hunger had conquered his taste, and he dug into the spicy dish. The odor of thyme and onion and tabasco made his mouth water despite himself. But he had scarcely filled his fork when a hand darted across the table—that slender olive-colored hand which Tom Yarre had thought so beautiful when it held a knife. The dish was whisked away, and the skipper, his eyes bulging, his breath bated, his mouth open, saw the plate and its contents hurled through the open door.

Juana turned her back upon him and walked regally into her kitchen.

The skipper regained his breath and brayed out oaths that the parrot of the Orinoco could never have memorized.

"I'll break every bone in her body, the damned rig! I'll flense her hide for her! I'll keelhaul the little cholo minx!"

He jumped to his feet, tipping the table

so that the mate's dish clattered to the adobe floor.

"Wait till I get my hooks on her."

The mate was swearing—though very softly—and Tom Yarre roared with laughter. The latter sound struck in on the skipper's rage, and he checked his flow of oaths with the sudden fear that he was being made a fool of.

"Let her wait," was his parting shot through the kitchen doorway, "until I get my hands on her yellow carcass!"

"I will bring you a banquet, skipper," the innkeeper said. "Forget about the woman—a cholo, as you call her. We can do nothing with her. She's like to be the death of us all! And if a man so much as makes a move to touch her—"

"Wait till I get my hands on her!" the skipper roared again.

"No man has ever yet put hands on that woman, skipper! Forget her. And I'll bring you some Juarez wine and a pullet—my best dish, which is called *arroz con pollo*! Your mouth will water."

"The damned minx!" Captain Jarvy grumbled, settling himself again at the table. "I'll make her muddy skin crackle, damn me! If I ever touch her—"

"No man has touched her yet, skipper!"

From his corner of the room Tom Yarre was still laughing and eating. During the lull in the storm he called to Herzog:

"If this is a sailors' joint," he said, "you probably know we seamen come ashore first—to find company."

"There will be a fiesta to-night," Herzog explained. "And lots of pretty women 'll come to dance."

"Wait a minute! I don't care about a fiesta. Tell that gal who's been feeding us that there is a mariner in here wants to make love to her."

CHAPTER IV.

A TEMPTING OFFER.

HERZOG, the innkeeper, objected politely to the astounding offer of his guest.

"You are a fine lookin' boatswain, if I

may say so, sir," he remarked humbly. "Too fine to get into a brawl with a kitchen-maid. You see how she acted before the skipper? If she treats a skipper that way, think how she will treat a—"

Herzog found himself on the wrong track.

"I mean to say, sir," he hurried on, "I will call her. But if you value your skin, don't make love to her."

The little nerve-racked man hurried off to the kitchen. In offering the boatswain's message to Juana, he wisely refrained from using the exact terms in which it had been given. He merely told the girl that the big seaman with the scars "settin' in the corner—wants a bit o' tobacco."

Following her usual custom, Juana took her time. Herzog, dismissing the boatswain from his mind, returned to the skipper with a bottle of his "Juarez" as a propitiatory gift.

The latter was soon drinking and gorging himself with the fried pullet and Spanish rice set before him. Between mouthfuls he still nursed his grievance, emitting grunts and oaths.

"I'll show the minx a thing or two before I'm through with her!"

"It's no use, skipper," Herzog objected while Captain Jarvy and his mate stuffed themselves. "We can't do anything with the woman. She's jake with her work and all that—but just so soon as you order her about—Bingo! There's trouble!"

"That sort of gel is best 'andled with a whip, I'd say!" the mate put in.

"Or a capstan bar!" the skipper suggested.

"No, sir!" Herzog cried strenuously. "She'd knife you, sir. She'd stick a knife across you if you blinked an eye at her. I will say that my wife—who's a big woman and strong as a mule—she bashes her one once in a while.

"But it's no use, sir. The very next day she'll come out here and insult my guests. Instead of smilin' at 'em, takin' their jokes, lettin' 'em kid her a bit and maybe dig her in the ribs—the way these here seamen like to do to womenfolk—she gets up her ole dander and like as not upsets a bowl of soup on their heads!"

"Give her the sack, me man," said Mr.

Grimpen in his unctuous voice. "That's orl you can do wiv her kind."

"Ah!" Herzog bemoaned. "Now you're diggin' into the past!"

"She ain't your *daughter*!" Captain Jarvy barked between mouthfuls. "Don't tell us that greaser lady's your daughter!"

"Thanks be to God, sir, no!" the innkeeper affirmed. "But you see, gents, it's like this: Her father left her to me—oh, it's now a dozen years. He went to jail. That's where *he* went for havin' a temper!"

"That's 'eredity, I'd say," Mr. Grimpen remarked knowingly.

"He left me a bit of money—damn me for ever takin' it!—enough to support a woman, but not a wild cat. Well, we set her to work and my ole lady beat her regular—that is in the old days. Now the minx is gettin' a bit too tall—"

"A bit too 'igh and mighty is my sentiments!" said Mr. Grimpen. "I'd like her to try and come it on with me, be gad!"

"She could have been a drawin' card in this sort of a place," the innkeeper said in the same sad tones. "That's what I figured on when I took her. I said to myself, wait till she's growed up a bit, and I'll have the water front flockin' around here like bees over my brew!"

"When she got to be near growed up we let a docker who loads cotton bales on them barges goin' to the gulf—we let him strike up an acquaintance with her one evening. We sort of egged him on, and for that matter me and my ole woman egged the gal on likewise. Well, gents, when them two gets together—God!"

Herzog put his hands to his bald head and shook in the horror of his remembrance. "But let me tell you: the bargeman was a big, rawboned cuss—as big as that bos'n of yourn over there—and it looked to us that in a pinch he'd orter been able to handle himself. But damme if he wasn't like a big lummox of a bull circlin' helpless in a corral while a puma-lion clawed him to pieces!"

"I'd like her to try and come it with me, be gad!" the mate repeated.

"Gents," Herzog went on, "after that no one made the mistake of thinkin' Juana attractive. No, sir, not for a whole year.

Then a poor, unsuspectin' bulker comes along. Well, he makes the disagreeable error, gents, of figurin' since no one else ever touched Juana, it 'd be easy sailin' because of lack of competition and rivalry! Wow!"

Mr. Grimpen, the mate, nodded his head seriously, as if the scene were vivid in his mind. The skipper, having licked his chicken bones clean, shoved back his chair, belched, and grumbled:

"The damned little Mexican punk! I'll twist her brown neck offen her!"

"This time," Herzog affirmed, "it weren't like a puma and a bull. No, gents. The man was like a fatted calf! And the gal like—well, I can't exactly explain what she was like standin' there in the middle of that floor with a knife! You can't describe it! It was terrible, wonderful! She was—well, take a look at her now, gents, and see if you get what I mean!"

Juana, understanding in her own peculiar way that she was supposed to obey the summons of guests in the dining room, had come to Tom Yarre's table.

The first part of their conversation could not be heard by the skipper, his mate or Herzog, but all three men were vitally interested spectators of the scene which ensued. A tragedy, they felt, was imminent. From the kitchen slouched Herzog's wife, a large, steamy woman with cheap diamonds and a sky-blue wrapper. Behind her fat shoulder the Jamaican cook thrust his frightened coffee-colored face. The spectators understood that a new guest was about to try his luck with Juana, daughter of Miguel!

"For why did you call, captain?" the girl asked when Tom Yarre looked up.

The boatswain did not immediately reply. He studied the girl's figure, which he observed was lithe, tall, proud. For some peculiar reason he thought that there was only one word which described that ragged figure—elegance.

"Say, look here!" he said suddenly instead of answering her question. "Why do you come when a bos'n calls? Do you obey the commands of any swobheaded lummox who calls you? You aren't a hash-slinger—that is, not by birth."

By a stroke of the most remarkable luck or perhaps because of a still more remarkable intuition—Tom Yarre had found the very word which caught the girl's ear—"birth."

She did not of course wear her heart on her sleeve and smile in pleasure. It was known that her father had been sent to jail. And to speak of birth, recalled that. Although from her point of view his crime was a matter of honor, it was futile to talk about it to every sailor who came to the Sundown Café. She answered Tom Yarre with her customary coolness:

"Do you know, capitan, out of every hundred gringos who want for to mak' love to a woman—a woman who works—ninety-nine say that she is born to something higher? What is that something to which she is born—aye? To be a jade sitting in the lap of a sailor from any port thees side of the Cap' Horn—aye?"

"You are right!" Tom Yarre remarked assuredly. "That is why I did not say what was really in my mind. If I said what was really in my mind you would be very surprised. No, you would merely think I was drunk and upset a pot of olla podrida on my head. Of course I knew well enough that many other men must have told you—just as I did—that you don't belong here."

"Never! Not wan man. Excep' you!"

"No? Then I will tell you—"

"There is no need. Don't get excite'. I know it better than you, Señor Capitan. But here I remain until my father, Miguel of Salamanca, comes back for me. Here I am imprisoned—of my own will. I have perform' every task set upon my shoulders. I have endur' every eensult. I have been beat by the *señora* who keeps this inn. No work is too lowly for me or too humble. I have perform' everything so that—ah—I will be here when *padre mio* comes back!"

"That is not reason enough for you to be a servant!" Tom Yarre said.

"What are you saying, Señor Capitan?" the girl asked bewildered.

"Instead of waiting in the galley for him—why not be like a queen waiting for her king?"

"Yes, that is what it is, capitan, waiting for a king!"

"Is it the job of a queen to be slinging tamales at every seaman who hauls into this joint? Is it a queen that sweeps sawdust and tobacco cuds from the deck of a lodging house? Is it a queen that lets an old bat like that woman over there poke her in the face? Hell, no!"

"Hell, no!" Juana repeated.

"You have no idea of your job. Listen here, *Chiquito* or whatever your name is, I am the one to show you what a queen is, savvy? I am going to change you like the old witch in the fairy tale took Cinderella out of the steward's department and stuck her up on the bridge! I'm goin' to show you how these people you are serving should act before you: they should slide in on their bellies and say: 'Here I am, your highness!'"

"That's what! They should fall on the deck and scrape and tremble and kiss the hem of your skirt—not that skirt you've got on, I will say that!"

Yarre laughed in his excitement. "They should say: 'Aye, aye! Your majesty!' instead of bawling out: 'Stand by with the hash there, gal!' Do you savvy, *Chiquito*? Daughter of a Spanish grandee—that sounds a bit more like it. 'Sling over some beans, your majesty!' Holy cripes! It's a sin—it's a damned sacrilege!"

"Are you crazy, Mr. Capitan?"

Skipper Jarvy, Mate Grimpen, Herzog, the cook and the woman in the sky-blue wrapper had heard nothing of this dialogue. They saw the boatswain talking earnestly to Juana and they sustained no doubts as to what his words were—simply the words of a sailor to a woman on shore.

But the large woman in the wrapper was curious. She swept into the dining room, and keeping a table in between herself and the two, moved as near as she dared to the boatswain's table. Herzog, the host, followed, keeping well behind his wife. The skipper, the cook and Mr. Grimpen leaned forward to catch the ensuing words:

"I said I am the one that will change you," Tom Yarre was repeating, "that is if you give me a chance."

Old phrases these were to the ears of the innkeeper and his wife. In this case they meant trouble. Herzog looked imploringly into Juana's face and he saw written upon

it a confirmation of his worst fears. Her eyes blazing, her chest heaving, she was poised waiting for one more word from the luckless sailor. And then, like a puma, she would spring.

Herzog backed away into the sanctuary of the corner where the skipper and his mate were waiting.

"I'm beggin' you, skipper," he whispered hoarsely, "call your man off. It 'll be horrible, and your old ship will be a bos'n short. Can't you warn the poor loon?"

Disregarding Herzog, the skipper leaned toward Yarre's table with a grim smile of expectancy tightening his mouth. The words of Juana rang softly and clearly in the breathless air.

"And what do I do, *señor*, to give you this chance to be a witch doctor and perform these miracles?"

The answer was an electric shock impregnating the silent room. It brought a pallor to the wrinkled face of old Herzog; it brought the mate's pale eyes bulging outward; it made the skipper open his mouth so that the puff of tobacco smoke lay dead in it. And finally it was enough to make the woman in the blue wrapper slink back again to the door of the kitchen.

"Let me talk to you alone," were the words that the boatswain uttered. "Up above—alone!"

The spectators saw the luckless man point upstairs—with a devil-may-care wave of his tattooed hand. If their ears could not be believed, if he had spoken so softly that they had misunderstood, at least this gesture left no doubt as to his meaning. He had actually asked Juana to go upstairs!

"*Madre de Dios!*" the girl cried voicelessly.

Yes, it was coming. Another scene—a puma lioness—and what would the unsuspecting prey seem like, this third time that Juana was insulted? A bull? A fatted calf? More probably a shorn lamb! The sailor was absolutely naïve, childlike, in his simple belief that he was inspiring love in the girl's heart.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Juana's chest heaved and her eyes flashed like the green fire in the eyes of a wolf. It seemed as if a strange light had inflamed her: she was radiant with

anger. Some men might have called her superbly beautiful—if it were not for that drab cotton smock.

Into that bosom of red cotton her hand crawled with the graceful undulation of a beautiful snake gliding into a bush of flowers.

"Her dagger! I knew it!" the innkeeper ejaculated in a scarcely audible moan.

Tom Yarre looked at the girl's hand, and when he saw the heft of the dagger appear—a gleam of black bone against the soft gold of her skin—he burst out into a hearty, ringing laugh.

"If you knew my real purpose in asking you to come above," he cried, "you would not be so ready to carve me up. Look here"—he leaned forward across the table and began whispering to her—"I have something that will look better on you than this cotton reefer you're wearing. I have jewels for your arms, and a comb for your hair that 'll look like a fore-royal in a breeze. If you want to wear a gown that will make you the belle of the fiesta tonight, you come with me. When I'm through with you, you'll make Cinderella look like a seacook."

"What lies do you spik to me?" the girl cried. "Sailors do not bring silks to Juana—or jewels to their women. Sometimes, yes, men like you bring such stuff as drunken dreams are made of!"

"The guests are coming to the fiesta, the music will start thrumming! Every one will dance—except the kitchen wench dragging around the decks onions and rotten meat and hardtack. Do you want to rule over them? Come above! I'll hoist a suit of sails on you that's never been dreamed of in this port!"

The boatswain caught the new light in Juana's eye. "I'll make 'em crawl on the decks to you and kiss your feet."

"If you're lying to me, *señor*—"

"If I'm lying to you, bring your bowie knife along! Carve me to mince meat for your tamales! Bite your name in my neck! Yank out my tongue with your claws!"

The little group in the dining room focused their bulging eyes on Juana's face. What they saw they could neither explain nor at first believe. There was a softening

of that wrath and fire—as if this terrible statue in rags had been breathed upon like Galatea being brought to life by Pygmalion. Juana's eyes were beautiful with a softer, warmer light. Was she in love with the man she had been about to kill?

"She's the same as all of them!" the skipper grunted disgustedly. "The little cholo!"

The mate sneered softly.

"Can it be possible," cried the innkeeper, "or am I locoed? Damned if she ain't givin' in!"

The knife went back into Juana's bosom—as slowly and certainly and as gracefully as it had been unsheathed. The black tousled head nodded in assent. The inscrutable lips parted—not with smiling, but with incredulity, wonder, anticipation.

"I'll come with you, *señor*," she whispered.

CHAPTER V.

ENTER A STRANGER.

AS Juana walked to the adobe steps which led upstairs, she surveyed the faces of the little crowd with a glance of regal contempt. When her eyes met the small twinkling eyes of the woman in the sky-blue wrapper there was a momentary pause—a duel of facial expressions.

Cora was at heart a jealous woman, although up to now Juana had never given her anything to be jealous about. The innkeeper's wife was puzzled, uneasy. With the intuition of a woman, she was the only one in the crowd who feared that something else might come of this love affair besides a carving up of the hapless seaman. But old Cora made the most out of the situation. Juana was falling from grace. The woman drew the hem of her sky-blue wrapper and stepped back with the age-old gesture of the pharisee crossing to the other side of the street when meeting a sinner.

But Juana swept regally up the stairs, giving the skipper, the mate, the innkeeper and the cook the peculiarly definite illusion that she had spat in Cora's face.

"I knew it—a cholo minx!" Cora sneered with the feeling that somehow she had been bested in that duel of glances.

"A jade!" cried the skipper.

"A little punk!" cried the mate.

"Har, har, har!" The cook could only shake his head in a knowing African laugh.

Herzog, the innkeeper, scratched his head incredulously.

"Somebody's locoed," he cried. "Mebbe it's me, but I ain't believing my eyes. You take it from me, gents, that gal ain't through yet. She took her bowie knife up, didn't she—eh? Well, you gents listen for the big howlin' when she starts in to slice him up. She'll do it, too—or else I'm plumb locoed."

The entrance of a guest into the vestibule of the Sundown Café temporarily demanded the attention of its inmates. An ordinary guest—such as a stevedore, barge-man or stoker—could not perhaps have attracted any notice at that particular time; but this guest was indisputably different.

He was a swarthy-faced man with thick black eyebrows, piercing eyes, high cheek bones and glistening teeth. He was dressed in a khaki suit, with a low-cut velvet vest upon which were embroidered flowers in red and green silk. Spurs with rowels of beaten silver clinked at his boot heels.

The man entered with a swagger that had its calculated effect. The innkeeper bowed and scraped, and the guest, having removed his tall-peaked sombrero, nodded condescendingly.

"A mozo for my horse, *señor*," he ordered. "For me, a bottle of wine. I am thirsty. And if I may suggest, I am lonely. I have ridden for many miles."

"And under the sun—eh, mister?"

"The sun, which is like the quirt to a horse, the storm to a ship, the hound to a hare. I am faint, I am famished, I am giddy, I am lonely."

Mr. Grimpen, the mate, who cocked his ear at sight of the stranger, heard this remark. He could see that the man was telling the truth. He was covered with dust; his face muddied with sweat; dust caked the tall-peaked sombrero, and was thickly powdered across the shoulders of

the khaki coat; it whitened the scarlet necktie and slashed trousers; it even misted the glint of the silver rowels.

"You say you're lonely, mister?" Herzog repeated. "By that you mean—"

"The soft voice of a woman drifting across the wineglasses, the touch of a jeweled hand, the benediction of beautiful eyes—"

"I'll fix you up," Herzog said. "You're in the right pew when you come to the Sundown Café. There's to be a fiesta."

The guest clinked his boots together with a flourish, beat up a cloud of alkali dust by striking his gauntlets on the table, then took a seat.

In the absence of Juana, the innkeeper found it necessary to employ his wife in the capacity of barmaid. Thrusting into her arms a tray with a bottle of wine and two glasses, he gave her a parting injunction:

"He's from acrost the border; and he smells somethin' awful with perfume. Mebbe he's from the city of Mexico or farther south than that. Who knows?"

"How do you know he ain't a criminal? What would a Mex be doin', ridin' this far?"

"Mebbe so! But bandits in this part of the world are refugees—they ain't got their bands with 'em. He's the very man to trim, because if he's a bandit he won't sick the police on us. Go after him and strip him good and proper."

"There's somethin' queer: a Mex ridin' a horse don't belong in this part of the country, I'm thinkin'."

"You don't have to do the thinkin'. Leave *me* do the thinkin' in this café. All as you need to do is to get the guests which I point 'em out to you to buy some liquor." With these remarks Herzog sent his wife in to meet the stranger.

Cora had been very successful in the past as the Circe of Sundown Café. She had found it easy to turn its patrons into hogs with wine. Bargemen admired her yellow hair, which to them was gold; they admired her rouge, which to them was the delicately shaded pink of youth; they also admired her form, one detail about which they sustained no illusions: she was fleshy.

It did not occur to Cora that the little man with the piercing black eyes, high cheek bones and swarthy face could be very vitally different in his tastes from the average water-front guest at the café. She went about her work with supreme confidence as well as, this time, with a vim. The man was handsome, romantic in appearance, a very different sort of guest than the average water-front character.

The fact is, his tastes were different also. He looked up at the large, heavy-set woman in the sky-blue wrapper, and by the expression on his face it seemed as if she had brought him a plate of *torrijas* which had been fried in bad eggs.

"Let me light your cigarette for you, mister," the lady of the house suggested graciously.

The stranger held up the cigarette—a long, thin wisp wrapped in black paper. He puffed up the sparks, then leaned back in his chair, nonchalantly surveying the two seamen sitting at a table across the room.

"Where are you from, mister?" Cora asked, filling one of the wineglasses.

"Yucatan."

The lady of the house waited expectantly for him to say something besides the one curt word—something perhaps which would invite conversation. But as he continued eying the two seamen, Captain Jarvy and his mate, under lazy, blue-veined lids, she went on:

"Yucatan, eh? A long journey, if you can believe what these here sailors tell you. On what ship?"

"I came by land."

Still the stranger gave no evidence of asking her to fill the other glass.

"Ah, yes—they told me you'd traveled some distance; that you were lonely. Eh, mister—lonely, is it?"

"No, I am not so lonely now."

Cora took this as a very definite compliment, and accordingly moved closer to the vacant chair.

The guest made a wry face over his glass.

"This wine has not soured, *señor*?" she asked.

"Not a bit. It is delicious."

"The last time I tasted it, it was very

good. A sea captain with gold stripes here"—she rubbed her fat arm—"asked me to sit down with him and drink with him. It makes my mouth water to think of that glass I had with him! Year in and year out I'll remember that taste."

"Was it so long ago since you have had a chance to sample this wine?"

"No, no, mister. Just yesterday the mate of a steamer asked me to set down with him and talk to him. He was lonely, too, mister, if you can believe a sailor."

"I see that you are the belle of this café, then?" the guest said absentmindedly. His gaze returned from the skipper and Mr. Grimpen. "Yes, yes, I can see you are a very beautiful woman."

Cora's vividly rouged lips parted in pleasure.

"They call me the Queen of the Sundown Café."

The shy drooping of her lids displayed a careful shading of blue grease paint.

"A queen!" the stranger exclaimed, standing up suddenly and pushing back his chair preparatory to a bow. "Then, *señorita*, it is not for me to invite you to sit down at the table of so humble a personage as myself. In my own country I was a matador. Bullfighters are generally, as you know, of the very lowest parentage; and it is so with me. You and I—curse the fates which brought us into this world!—can have nothing to do with each other!"

"You mean you're giving me the air?" Cora asked rather loudly.

"If my countrymen knew that I—a bullfighter—had dined with a queen, they would accuse me of gross impudence, or I would be most surprised."

"I get your game, you little greaser!"

"In fact, they would tar and feather me for the presumptuous peon that I am!"

"All right, then, Mr. Mex! I wouldn't set down with you for a farm. What you need is a little cholo woman—like the one we got upstairs. When she throws over that sailor friend of hers, we'll give you an introduction. She's one of your kind."

Skipper Jarvy, having listened to this contest with considerable amusement, burst out now into a loud guffaw at the sight of Cora's humiliation. But Mr. Grimpen,

his mate, seated opposite to him, put up his finger warningly.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Before you go strikin' up an acquaintance with these balmies, take a good look at that rotter with the shinin', sparklin' teeth. Wot do you think of him?"

"What do I think of him? A Mex! Or rather some lubber from Yucatan."

"You've clicked, skipper—Yucatan is right. Don't that make you shiver? *Yucatan!*"

"What the hell!"

"It was there our old stoker got his bloody sea chest—that's wot the 'ell. It's somethin' to get a bit squiffy abaht!"

"Just because this lubber hails from the same country!" the skipper began scoffingly. "Well, of all the superstitious, yellow-livered skunks, Mr. Mate, you're—"

"Orl right! Orl right! But lookee here. The stoker said something abaht that bleedin' chest which has me in a funk, skipper. He said not to open it afore we hauled up past the Tropic of Cancer. It was got with much blood, says he. Damn the ole rotter! Openin' that there chest, skipper, reminds me of the tale of the ole gel who opens a box called, as I remember, Pandora's box, which when the lock is orf a cloud of blahsted devils gets loose and—"

The skipper cut him off with a flouting of jeers and oaths.

"Well, if you ain't a flyin' jib, Grimpen, I'm dead drunk!"

"Orl right, then, skipper. And if this here toff from south of the Tropic of Cancer hears as how we're loaded to the gills with silver and gold—"

"Now you're talkin' sense, Mr. Grimpen," Captain Jarvy said in a changed voice. The thought of the large amount of money they were both carrying brought a frown.

"It strikes me, mate, we better shag outen here instead of waitin' for a damn sweatin' fiesta. Mebbe all as this fiesta is for is to lambaste a few guests in the jaw. Like as not mine host is waitin' until his guests have a bit more ballast aboard."

The skipper pounded on the table with the desire of settling his bill with the proprietor. A moment later the two mariners

hoped to be out on the lonely road, which they decided was a safer place, under the circumstances, than the Sundown Café.

But they had come to their decision a little too late. Something happened at the very moment that Herzog came hobbling toward their table. It was not an event which could be called immediately serious, but it was enough to delay their departure indefinitely.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISION—A TYPHOON!

HERZOG, the innkeeper, was an interested witness to only a part of his wife's meeting with the stranger. For no sooner had he sent Cora into the dining room than his attention was drawn to a small, trembling man who stood in the doorway which led from the patio into the kitchen. It was the stable mozo, who stood staring with wide-open, muddy eyes, kneeding his clawlike fingers in the greatest perturbation.

"*Señor*—the stranger's horse—" the man stammered. "It is scarred in the belly, *señor*! And if I know what such scars mean, he was gored by a bull!"

"What of it?" Herzog laughed. "It's an old horse, and its master comes from across the border. Like as not it's some picador's nag he picked up in the bull-ring."

"Even so, *señor*. I understand that. But the man himself—you have heard of *Señor El Gato*—"

"*El Gato*? *El Gato*?" Herzog repeated. "Yes, some of the sailors have talked of him. But that was long ago—"

"He is the man, *señor*, who was a great bullfighter in Havana and the City of Mexico—a man whom they say went bad, like some horse or other animal which has something wrong in its brain. He is the man—do you not remember, *señor*?—who left the arena when young, but after he had cut off his pigtail he could not satisfy the taste he had for blood."

"Ah, yes—now I remember.

"And he went about stabbing men, as he had stabbed bulls?"

"Yes, yes, but just because this man happens to be a bullfighter, you have no more brains than to insist that he is the feared and fugitive *El Gato*?"

"But, *señor*, this *El Gato*, certain sailors told us, was greatly feared in Nicaragua, where in Managua he wounded men without number."

The mozo wrung his hands in desperation. "Do you not remember a ship's captain telling us how he heard again of him in Honduras, where he had fled because of the price on his head?"

"And then later a ship from Puerto Cortes brought terrible tales. From these facts, *señor*, one can guess that he was coming northward in his flight."

"It's all nonsense. This man *El Gato* you're whimpering about was a don from some famous Castilian family. The bullfighter in there says he is of the lowest classes—too low, he said, to even drink wine with my wife. He must be pretty damn low!"

The mozo shook his head doubtfully. "He is maybe clever enough to say that—to throw us off the track. And they say also of him that he is most chivalrous to women. That is perhaps only his way of refusing to drink with your wife!"

"B' God, you may be right!" the innkeeper admitted. "If that is so, God help this house! And yet"—there was a different note in his voice, crafty, hopeful—"if it is *El Gato*, he's got enough to buy all the wine in my cellar! All I need now is a woman to make him."

The innkeeper did not know that the very woman he wanted to do his trick was Juana, his maidservant, who had gone upstairs in company with an insignificant and penniless sailor.

When Tom Yarre, the boatswain, followed Juana into the little room under the eaves of the house, he struck a match. The girl stood not three feet away, and the boatswain caught the gleam of her knife and the phosphorescent sheen of her eyes. He felt as if he had followed a panther into a lair.

He was right.

No sooner had the lantern smoked up

in response to the lighted match than Juana faced him.

"Now, then, Señor Capitan, you think you can mak' Juana promises out of the thin air which the chameleon eats? You think you can deceive Juana as sailors deceive other women—and give her the dust instead of the satin and silk?"

"You say you will clothe me for the fiesta to-night—eh? And with what? With shame—that is what! With paint on my face—eh? With the bruise of your fingers on my arm and the marks of your teeth on my cheek! Those are the clothes you spik of! Come closer, Señor Capitan, Señor Liar! The hombre who mak's promises, the hombre who thinks to deceive! Come closer so that I may—"

Juana paused breathlessly, her lips parted, her thin jet eyebrows raised in astonishment. Something—a gorgeous heap of scarlet and gold on the floor—had caught her eyes. Could it be that this sailor's boast was to be fulfilled? Could it be that he was not a liar? What manner of man was this who made such strange promises and kept them? It was bewildering, astounding! She stared as if spellbound at the serapes and silk, the tangle of brocade, the onyx glowing in the dust, and the resplendent jade comb which she had stepped on with her ragged shoe.

"Caramba! But what is this dream I am dreaming, Señor Capitan?" Juana cried, her great brown eyes glowing.

Tom Yarre looked at her laughingly. Because of the dark frown upon her face and the hair tumbling down over her forehead, he noticed that her eyes were like onyx jewels glowing beneath dust.

The boatswain swept up the silks in his two arms.

"When I hoist these sails on you, *señorita*, you'll be a sight to see! You'll be like a wrecked hulk changed to a full-rigged ship bubbling along in a breeze!"

"And is it for this you called me up here, *señor*?" the girl asked excitedly.

"Take down your hair!" the boatswain cried. "You can't be the Queen of Spain with a jury rig like that on your head."

There's little doubt what Juana under ordinary circumstances would have done

when Tom Yarre thrust his hand into the black silk mesh of hair which was her coiffure. But at that moment the sound of a lively syncopated fandango thrummed up through the floor of the room. The mechanical piano in the dance hall below had started its rhythmical vibration. Guests were arriving. A guitar stabbed the air with taunting chords.

Down came the luxuriant black mass of Juana's coiffure, rippling over olive-colored shoulders, dividing in cloudy, black streams between the fingers of the boatswain's tattooed hand. Juana had forgotten herself!

"Have you an eye for beauty, *señorita*? Or are you so used to this ugly, vermin-ridden place that you want to keep on the old oilskins?"

"It is ugly things that is all I have seen of this world, *señor*," the girl cried. "No man has ever offered me anything but ugliness before; it is a world of cactus, and hog wallows and desert sand and mud arroyos. I hate cactus, *señor*, except when the blossom comes upon it. I hate adobe, dirt, dust—for that is all that any man has given Juana.

"I came up here for to kill you, *señor*, because I thought you were like the others. I wanted to cut you in pieces. I wanted to carve out your heart. See, with this knife—I brought it up for that—*señor*!"

The girl burst out passionately as she dropped the knife clanging to the floor. "Señor Capitan, instead of adobe you have give me silk; instead of ugliness you have give what is beautiful!"

"It so happens that the skipper and his mate did not leave me what is generally called filthy—money. The lucre they kept for themselves. And what they left me in their grim, joking way was a suit of sails to unfurl upon a woman. What they gave me as a joke I give you with the hope that you will blossom out in beauty as a mustard bush I once saw in Yucatan which was like a stink bug one day and a Christmas tree the next. Take this stuff, *señorita*. It's yours, as the skipper said to me, to have and to hold!"

Juana clutched the blazing scarlet silk, pressing it to her face and mouth as if she were drinking in its beauty, tasting it, smell-

ing it, kissing it, wildly, impetuously, like some one who having starved on the desert has found food.

She whirled about, twining the scarf around her shoulders, letting the shimmering soft stuff ripple over her bare arms; and then, snatching up another gorgeous piece of cloth, unwound it, and as it fluttered in the air, spun her body about so that the serape wrapped itself around her lithe hips.

"Come now, my girl," the boatswain laughed. "Off with your shoes! They're the ugliest thing about you. Bare feet and anklets—that's what go with this rig!"

Next she peeled off her stockings—striped red cotton with runners down the backs and holes at the toes. With these off the boatswain was treated to the prettiest olive-skinned ankles and arched feet he had ever seen.

Whether the curious bands of silver with their engraved legends were bangles or anklets he did not know. But these he clasped about her feet. Then came the first part of the costume: a flowing cloth of scarlet silk, upon which were designed certain Aztec symbols in gold cloth. She wound this tightly about her hips making a robe which fitted tightly about her bosom. The boatswain tucked the last fold in under one arm.

Next he took up the serape which was of a gorgeous yellow with a flowering of black like an iron filigree against the noon sky. This he wound tightly about her in the manner of a bodice.

"I've seen them wear it like this when we anchored at Para in Brazil and then again fine ladies wear it this way at bull fights in Tampico or chicken fights in Luzon. Now, then, for your hair, *infanta*. God, what hair! Pile it up, that's the way! Coil it, braid it and put a mountain of curls on your head—like the Queen of Spain before she went to Paris!"

The girl divided her hair in two luxuriant braids, then with her spread fingers combed one side into three long strands. This she braided while Tom Yarre looked on, picturing to himself how he had seen coiffures under lace rebozas at Seville, or under kapok floss as the mestizos wore their hair in Manila.

With the boatswain's bizarre suggestions

it seemed that the very shape of Juana's face was changed; the hair was pulled back tightly, displaying the warm, olive-colored forehead, and the thin, jet-black eyebrows; her eyes seemed more strange, upward-slanting, exotic. It was a beautiful coiffure—not only because of Tom's imagination perhaps, but because no matter how she put it up it would have been beautiful. Some men might even have seen the beauty of it when her eyes glowed through the tangled wisps of it hanging over her forehead.

"There you go now, my lady!" he cried, holding up the lantern triumphantly. "That's the way to rig your hair so that men will crawl to you on hands and knees. And here—"

He picked up the jade comb—that part of the loot apportioned to him by the skipper, which he had thought the most useless and insulting of all. "Let me stick this comb up here where it 'll look like the crown of a cockatoo! There you are, my beauty! It's like a coronet to you, and it's good for the skipper's eye, damn him! He'll swear to kill a dozen men for you—the old walrus. And keelhaul me if he won't do it! The old lummo! Go after him and ask him to put his hooks on you—as he swore he would!"

The boatswain stood back to survey the picture he had created. The figure of Juana in her regal garments was as ethereal as one of the velvet moths which flickered across the dusty beams of the lamplight. Tom Yarre could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Go down and try your power," he cried. "Tell them you are the daughter of a Spanish grandee! A sailor from across the sea has brought you the news!"

"And I am!" Juana cried. "My father was wan grandee, even if in this country they prosecute him!"

"Very well, tell them you are a descendant of Cortez and that rightfully you would be queen of this country."

"I will tell them! I will trample them under my feet! I will avenge the many wrongs that old Herzog has done to me, and for every blow his wife strike I will make her suffer tenfold. *Madre de Dios* but they will all wish they had never been born. If they had millstones about their necks, and if

they throw themselves into the sea, it ees better for them than to be the subjects of Juana, their new queen!"

"Damned if I ever knew a jury rig could change a woman as you're changed! Go easy or you'll have them knifing each other to pieces before eight bells. The old skipper will plug a hole through any man that smiles at you! Take my word for it. The mate will lick the very deck you walk on! Go on, Señorita Jezebel! Go down! Breed war! Make men kill themselves at the sound of your voice like the sirens! You are the witch of Hy Brazil! You are the haunting lady of the North Sea! You're Zaza of Cairo! Zowie!"

She swept out of the room like a dream vanishing into the darkness. The boatswain followed, and then as she came into the shaft of light which struck up through the stair well he was again reminded of the velvet moths.

She had been a crawling worm, but now she was arisen with wings. She had fluttered out of the sea chest like a butterfly from its cocoon—like a fury from the box of Pandora. Jove had created a woman and sent her down to destroy mankind. As Tom Yarre saw the girl walk down the adobe steps, her train sweeping in the dust, he held his breath as if expecting at any moment the start of a battle.

"If the old stoker who gave us that chest is still drifting back to his home, as the sea tradition goes, I reckon there's a merry light hovering over the water where his body is. He's laughing, if a dead man ever laughed, and what he said about that chest is a prophecy, if a sweating stoker ever prophesied on sea or land."

From the top of the stairs Tom Yarre looked down to the mess of steamy flesh in the dance hall to watch the effect of Juana's entrance. By this time a large crowd of water front characters had gathered.

Bargeman and docker, crimp and scouse, dance girl and sea cook stared, gaping at the sight of a bare foot treading lightly in the shadows with a glint twinkling succinctly on the legends of a silver anklet.

"What new dancing girl was this?" they cried, thinking perhaps that Herzog had imported some South American solo dancer

to perform the fantastic *guaracha*. And whose beautiful foot was this emerging from the dark? A slender ankle, the soft, transparent brown curving exquisitely toward the gorgeous scarlet folds which the girl held slightly lifted. It could be no dancer—but a guest—some fine lady from a ship in port!

Captain Jarvy stood up, his gray, bushy brows lowered over red eyes. Here was the sort of woman he had searched for in every harbor! Whatever intention he had had of leaving the tavern, he made up his mind now, after one glance, to stay.

And the mate, too, decided to stay no matter what danger beset him! His eye followed the gorgeous spectacle of that red-draped robe upward to the tight-fitting bodice, and the arms where silver bracelets glittered against warm olive. Mr. Jarvy would willingly have given all the condors and pesos he possessed to kiss those arms.

Tom Yarre saw the two officers of his ship react to the picture that he had painted.

"They took what was worthless out of that sea chest"—he laughed triumphantly—"and gave me everything! Now we'll see what old Rob Hawkins, the dead stoker, will do!"

Cora, the innkeeper's wife, was the first one to cross the floor and meet Juana. Still burning with the humiliation of her meeting with the guest from equatorial America she was eager to find out whether she was losing her sway over the inhabitants of the Sundown Café.

"The nerve! The insolence of the hussy!" she cried. "Get into the kitchen where you belong or I'll box your ears for you!"

"Sure, get along with you, you little Mex!" Herzog added. "The guests are waiting for some service!"

Cora stopped, her fists doubled, her eyes blazing with resentment, hatred, jealousy, and then with a peculiar fear. What was this apparition? What new intangible and dreadful power did this scullion maid from the kitchen possess? The upraised arm was poised undecided, impotent. A feeling of awe overcame the flabby, painted woman—she was like a servant, or rather, a slave in the presence of her queen.

"What insult is this, hurled at so beautiful and highborn a lady?" the matador from Central America cried, leaving his seat and coming to the center of the room.

The crowd of sailors and bargemen was frozen now in anticipation of the sort of fight they all desired. An insult! A beautiful woman! A strange guest!

"Look here, mister," the innkeeper advised, "let me say confidential-like that you're kotowin' to a gal which she belongs in the kitchen."

The matador did not turn about. He was entranced with the sight of the woman before him—a woman decked as they were decked in his own country.

"She ain't the gal for you, mister."

"Give me the word, most gracious *señorita*," the matador cried passionately, "and I will kill him! You are a beautiful woman—the kind all men will die for. Permit me to kiss your hand, and in return I will kill this man who insults you."

Juana paused a moment, looking into the aquiline, swarthy face before her.

"Who are you?" she asked coolly.

"Señor El Gato—have you never heard that name?"

The innkeeper backed away, paling with fright. The mozo shrunk out to the kitchen with a terror-struck whimper.

Tom Yarre, standing on the steps and surveying the scene and its actors with a whimsical and benign sort of interest, wondered if the girl would try her power now, or peremptorily put an end to the Spaniard's advances by slapping his face.

The very next instant he was satisfied. Old Rob Hawkins, too, must have been satisfied as he floated about in the depths of the sea.

Instead of slapping the matador, which would have put Juana in the position she had always been in—a pretty wench whom no man could touch—she held out her hand. And Tom Yarre noticed that the manner of her holding it was like a queen knighting a soldier who has won a battle. He actually shuddered at the power she assumed by that one simple gesture.

"I'm thinkin'," the boatswain said to himself, "it would have been better if we'd never cast the lock off that damned sea chest. I've thrown sixpence overboard for a breeze, and here, be God, comes a typhoon!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



SHOWERS

RAIN in the sunshine,
Sparkling, crystal rain—
Glad tears by parted lovers shed
Who meet again.

Sunshine through the rain,
Soft, gold-dripping sun—
Bright hope that lovers part no more
When life is done.

Sun and rain—a rainbow,
Joy against the sky—
Love's promise to all lovers that love
Shall never die.

Edith Tatum.



Mooning Among Moonshiners

By ROBERT ORDWAY FOOTE

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

WHEN I was pitched off that launch into the liquid mud that is known as the historic James River of Virginia, bystanders on the banks—if there had been any—might have supposed that I was the loser in some frightful contest of blood and muscle. And as usual, the bystanders—which weren't—would have guessed wrong.

There used to be a song among us boys down south—maybe you've heard it—about "Moonshine Medicine." Touching little ditty it was, but its touch is gone. What with the Eighteenth Amendment boys rounding up the hillbillies faster than the tribes can build new stills, it is a mighty unpopular air, as a reminder of days that are no more and "Ain't never goin' to be no mo', nohow," as our colored friends mournfully aver.

I ought to have had more sense than to cackle the song. It shows what a diseased idea of humor I have. Even at the time I couldn't find it in my heart to blame the rest of the gang for their vigorous objection.

They didn't say a word, but there was a right pretty scrap. They came in force, to avenge my sin of bringing visions of tall, cooling delights—by singing about them on a hot Virginia day with not a promising thunder cloud in sight. Overboard I went, head first, clothes, hat and all, sent splashing into the twenty-foot deep channel.

But the James isn't wide, even if a generous government does keep it deep. I came up looking like the chocolate-colored individuals who constitute a third of Virginia's population. Looking back over the stern with revengeful grins, the gang kept on chugging down the river, bound on a

shad fishing jaunt to Dutch Gap, leaving me to swim ashore. Probably they knew I could do it. Even a Southern jury will not countenance careless murder like that.

In a way poetic justice had asserted itself. The place where I had thus unwisely drawn the gang's attention to the nation's arid condition was exactly off what was, in the days before any of us began acquiring savings bank accounts, known as the Beer Garden. It was a picnic ground of the gone but not forgotten past. A grove of little pines grew close by the water's edge, with a ramshackle old slab building looking down over the river. Once the boards of its veranda were smooth enough for dancing. A little farther back in the pines was a clearing, with a dilapidated platform in the center that once had been used for prize fights. Off at the side were a couple of little buildings where the fighters dressed and their managers matched coins to see which one should win, this time.

I knew the place perfectly for I'd been there plenty of times before our national squabbles took me off, first to the border and then overseas and the military life knocked a little sense into me.

I saw the gang intended to leave me here until they came back the next morning. I knew it first on general principles, because, distinctly, I knew I deserved it. Secondly, because a little down stream the launch steered in close to the bulkhead and the gang tossed over onto the bank one of the baskets of provisions, tooted the fog-horn twice, and headed the leaky old tub of a launch down stream again.

There I was, sitting on the bank, dripping James River mud and trying hard to feel indignant. But all the time I was realizing the justness of the retribution dropping me in this particular spot for singing the particular song I had.

There was nothing but lonesomeness and bum fishing ahead of me for about eighteen hours. Of course, I could if I felt like it hike twelve miles back through the woods and catch an electric car to the city. When I got there I could answer a lot of fool questions as to why I quit the party. I decided to stay where I was.

To-morrow morning I would be taken off

by the gang, who would have big strings of fish and bigger strings of lies and I'd hate myself for a month thinking of this wasted holiday.

Meanwhile, if the mosquitoes did not devour me alive during the night, I was in for a tiresome siege of myself. Philosophy, after a hand-to-hand struggle with impatience, during the time I was drying off on the bulkhead, won out and I voted a negative on the idea of walking out. So I arose and hustled down to retrieve the lunch before it was discovered as manna from Heaven by some industrious ant.

The basket wasn't there. If it had not been for the mark in the mud where it hit, I would have suspected myself of seeing things in imagining it was pitched off. But there was the mark in the soft mud. And there was likewise the print of a bare human foot; not a large one.

"Some pickaninny is having the spread of his young life," I reflected and turned Indian trailer.

This beat fishing four ways from the ace, because there weren't any fish in the river here anyhow. I had conclusive evidence that my kind of game was somewhere among the trees, but I couldn't follow the tracks far. They beat off into the grassy woods.

It must have been an average small dark-eye, I figured, because the footprints were small and anybody knows how tiny a coon must be to have a foot to which that word can be applied, even in infancy. For an hour or two I wandered around the woods, took a look at the clearing and the two little cabins there. They did not seem to be falling to pieces as much as the big front building. The doors were padlocked.

If I had been less intense in my search for the edibles I'd have investigated the cabins further. But from being a pastime this thing of hunting for my grub had become a life interest. I must either locate the little smoke before he ate up all my supplies or I must walk those twelve miles to the electric line, unless I could locate a white folks' house nearer. Something was going to happen to that thief, I kept telling myself. Mighty slim comfort it was, too, with me getting more emaciated as time elapsed.

I was well back of the clearing, chasing around promiscuous, when it occurred to me that I had passed up the most likely place of all, the old beer hall, itself. I beat it back and, realizing that the human animal I sought probably was acute of ear, I put my attention to giving a lifelike imitation of a gumshoe artist as I approached the building. Starting from the river side, I began to encircle it.

The front was falling to pieces fast, boards broken through on the old veranda dance floor, the windows busted, the door hanging on its hinges, very different from the well preserved look of the cabins by the clearing. I got around pretty near the back before I smelled smoke and realized, with inner convulsions, that somewhere around here a fire was being put to its proper use to cook food with.

A lot of my caution forsook me. Even if some kinky-haired young agent of the devil had made off with my food, for which I was beginning most pronouncedly to hanker, the evidence of near by substitutes was sustaining. I hustled around the old beer hall. At the back had been the old kitchens and help's rooms, in the palmy days of the establishment.

Even in my hurry I had time to notice that the porch floor was all right here and the windows intact. One of the doors was standing open, there was a light inside, for by this time it was getting dusk, and somebody was stirring around. It was no time for formalities. I walked up to the door and knocked before my anxious eyes saw what was inside.

A little slip of a girl, it seemed like, with blond hair coiled on her head in no sort of shape, her feet bare and an old, patched calico gown concealing whatever excuse for feminine form she might have, was working over the stove, producing appetizingly smelling chuck. The table was set for two people. And there on one corner of it was my missing basket of grub—it couldn't be any other, our gang bought a number of them for use on the launch. Before I could let off the steam of indignation that was generating in me the girl, who had heard my step, turns toward me as cool as you please, saying:

"Howdy. You been right smart long comin' to your supper. I reckoned you'd be hungry long afore this, after that bath you done had."

When I saw her face I saw that my assumption that she was just a little girl was a bum guess. She looked about eighteen and might have been more. I glanced down at her bare feet. There was mud, a little, between the toes. This was what I'd been chasing around in the woods for two hours hunting for, all right. I was so dumfuzzled I couldn't speak. The girl started to get a painful red and snapped out:

"Wal, come on in and eat. Ain't you hungry? Cain't you see your place there? I hope you washed."

"I will," I says, and beat it out to the spring in back, as much to collect my feelings as to wash my fins.

II.

WHEN I came in I was more self-possessed. This young person wasn't going to bluff me any. What business did she have grabbing on to my commissary, anyhow?

"You've got a nerve, going out there and confiscating my feed," I objected.

"Eat it afore you kick so much," she came back with a flash in her eyes. I saw I was up against one of those untamed little she-wildcats you hear about in the mountains. "Set," she says.

I "set," but I still had gumption left to continue the subject.

"What'd you swipe it for, anyhow?" I demands, as fierce as I dared.

"If you ain't et nothing 'cept a bit of corn-pone for two days I reckon you'd hook it, too," she answered, defiant.

"Nothing for two days!" I looked at her keenly. She sure did appear drawn and worried. "You poor little kid!"

"Shut up your mouth and mind your victuals," she snapped out.

But I noticed she kept passing me things, anxious like, and I knew that even if she had resented my pity openly, she was thankful for it inside. It was that which nerved me to say, when I judged a full stomach might have promoted more sociability:

"How come you ain't had anything to eat for two days?"

"Paw, he ain't come home," she said, caught off her guard, and then ripped out, "What the hell business of yours what I eat?"

I saw I'd have to go mighty slow if I was going to solve this taffy-headed, muddy-toed, human enigma, so I filled my pipe and lazied back, watching her clean up a bit. She was uncommon spry and clever. When it seemed safe I asked:

"Where'd your paw go?"

"Where he'd get booze, I reckon," she answered, kind of sorrowful like this time. "Lawd knows what he wanted to for, with all he's got."

"All he's got?" I questioned, getting interested. The hint started my mind back to "Moonshine Medicine."

"Some folks never did learn to mind their own minding," she said, waxing sarcastic instead of being snappy. "What's bitin' on you? You wantin' a drink, yourself, I suppose."

"I could use one," I confessed.

"Yes, and then you'd use a few more and pretty soon paw'd have to hustle back and start the still going so's to satisfy his own cravings."

Her voice sort of tapered off and her eyes got even bigger than they naturally were. She saw she'd made a bad break, because right afterwards she started in cussing in Cracker White talk about fellows that always came butting into business that didn't concern them.

As for me, I was busy thinking about those two well preserved cabins out by the clearing. I was as familiar as most anybody with the river and even I hadn't known anybody lived in the back of this old beer hall. It was easy guessing where that still must be. I seemed to have happened into a moonshiner's dump at a most auspicious moment—when he wasn't home.

"And you a-setting there, a-wishing you could put your snoot into some of the nasty stuff, too. You, what looks like such a respective sort I even 'vited you in to supper. You'd like to be making a human he-hog out-a yourself, too, just like that worthless paw of mine." The girl was

winding up some long tirade to the start of which I hadn't paid any attention, being kind of hypnotized with fond fancies of what might be. I was making up my mind those dreams was sure going to come true, when she went on:

"I wish there warn't no more of the awful stuff in the world, nohow."

"There ain't, near as I been able to find out in tireless investigations," I suggested mildly.

"There's enough to ruin my life. Some day when that worthless old man goes away I'll starve to death, 'cause I can't go to the neighboring blacks to beg food. I'm white and I'm proud, even if my feet is dirty."

I hadn't been conscious that I was looking at her feet every little while, but I suppose I had been and she had noticed. Those feet fascinated me; they were small and dainty, in spite of the mud and dirt; seemed sort of to fit her small, dainty body. I was all ready to dodge the frying pan, which I figured she was going to swing at me, when all of a sudden she sat down on the box that served for the other chair, put her arms on the table, her head on them and began to cry.

There was a fine fix for a young bachelor. Married men are used to sudden twists like that, so I've heard, but me, gee, I was helpless as if I'd had a baby to feed and dress. I smoked a minute or two, trying to figure it out and then I decided she was just a kid and that was the best way to go at her. I don't know how it happened, but in a minute or two I had her on my lap and was petting her head and telling her that I wished there wasn't any booze and that I'd find a nice place for her and her paw to live where there wasn't any hooch or any chance for him to make any.

"He won't never go while he's got all that stuff out in the cabin." She didn't make any bones of telling me about it now. "And that damn still in the other shed to make more when he wants it to sell or drink hisself. I wish them things was in hell."

The cuss words showed she was perking up a little. I wanted to keep up the good work so I made a happy suggestion.

"Let's go smash the booze and the factory," I says.

It was a horrible idea to grow in the brain of a man that had been thrown into the river just a few hours before when he referred longingly to "Moonshine Medicine." But holding a woman on your lap, even only a half-portion of half-grown female child, has a funny effect on a man's previous inclinations.

"Will you?" She jumped up and stood in front of me, all eagerness, her eyes glistening in the rays of the lantern that was our only light, for it was dark now outside.

"I will," I agreed, reaching for the lantern.

I would not have known it was Duffy McFie, which is myself. Looking back even now I half doubt that it was me who stood inside that carefully preserved shed, after we'd smashed the door with an ax, and reached down through the secret door in the floor for jug after jug of mountain dew for that slip of a girl to carry out one by one and break. The whole clearing smelled like Louisville in its most prosperous days.

"Your old man'll get a fresh jag soon's he approaches this atmosphere," I told her.

"My paw's a funny cuss," she confided, for she was getting real friendly now. "When he's stewed he acts most almighty crazy—why, he don't even know me then! To hear him tell it, he not only hain't got no girl, but never had none. Reckon that's why he don't never leave me nothing to eat when he goes off for a couple of days."

"This ought to sober him up," I encouraged her. "We've busted twenty gallon jugs. This must be a regular business establishment."

"He can make more with that still," and she waved at the other shanty.

"Want to smash that, too?" I was ready for anything now.

"I'm scared," she says. "He's got some kind of a electric contrivance rigged up to kill anybody what touches it. Says he'll fix any damned Federal officer comes pokin' round here."

"Anyhow, he won't get drunk to-night, unless he does it through his nostrils," I opined.

"He won't need to; he'll have plenty of it afore he gets back. That man can al-

ways find the stuff." She was getting gloomy again. "Oh, I wish I could only get him up to Judge Rodenhouse. Judge promised me last time I seen him up river he'd send my old paw to take the cure—whatever that is."

I knew the judge. In the old wet days he'd had liquor cure as his pet hobby, always sentencing men to it instead of to jail. We boys used to say he resented the coming of prohibition because it interfered with his reformation work.

"What would you do, while he's taking it?" I asked.

"Judge says he'll get me a job."

"What do you want to cure him for, if he's so mean to you. Why not just jail him?"

She hung her head a minute.

"I reckon I'm kind of fond of the old cuss, when he's sober," she said, like she was ashamed of her daughterly affection.

"Would you like me to get him up to the city to the judge for you?" I asked her.

"You couldn't never do it. I done coaxed and coaxed."

"I mean do it by force," I explained. I found I was getting so I didn't want this funny little frowzy-head to think there was anything I couldn't do.

"Make him! He's a lot bigger'n you and a regular scrapper, too."

I could see her sizing me up, like she wasn't overly impressed with my prowess. I was slim, but I reckoned I was equal to any drunken sot of a dad she had. And I wanted to convince her. Anyhow, I couldn't leave her here to the mercy of a brute like her father must be. I knew the gang would be back during the forenoon, following their fishing. If I tied up the moonshiner to take up to the old judge and took the girl along, to turn over to some charitable institution, my conscience would be clear.

"What time does he usually show up?" I asked, not deigning to humor her doubts.

"Some time afore daylight."

"How?"

"Down the river in his skiff. Sometimes he's so soused he misses the bulkhead and floats 'way on down, but mostly he makes it so straightlike you'd never know he had a drunk on." Her voice was unconcerned.

It bothered me to see such a bright little thing taking her father's liquor fighting habits so much as a matter of course. I sat there silently wondering if, after all, the prohibition long-hairs didn't have something on their side besides votes. By and by she spoke up to say:

"You try to lick the old man if he's able to make the landing straight and you're in for one scrap."

"I'll take the contract to lick him sober, let alone drunk," I answered.

What kind of masculine idiocy it was that made me want to talk and act big in front of this bare-footed woods girl I couldn't fathom. But the inclination was there; I was more anxious to impress her than I had been any of the home girls after I got back from the war. Perhaps it was because she was such a scrappy little bunch of nerve herself, with a chip on her shoulder most of the time.

"Come on down by the water front, where we can sit quiet and wait for him," I suggested, leading the way.

"You better sleep and get strong, man, if you figger on licking paw," she says, kind of soft, and I was suspicious she was laughing a little at me to herself. "I will call you when I hear him comin'."

I had no intention of following her advice, but as we sat on the rickety old steps, after we had scared up a rope with which I proposed to tie up the old man, I did doze off a little. The girl didn't seem to have anything more to say. I thought she was snoozing a bit herself.

III.

THE first thing I knew I felt myself shook. When I tried to ask what the rum-pus was about I found a little hand over my mouth and recollected where I was and what I had to do. Somehow, in the nap, my ambition to lick this sight-unseen moonshiner had considerably oozed out. But with that girl there beside me, whispering softly in my ear that her paw was coming, I would have thought of quitting as quick as I would of leaving for the rear in the Argonne and I defy anybody to accuse me of that.

I could hear oars moving softly in oarlocks and dimly see, out there on the water, heading straight in for the old beer hall landing, a boat. The rickety landing was no place for a fight. I moved out close to the foot of it, where there was good solid ground and hid behind a pine tree. The kid came along behind, bringing our rope with her.

The minute that boat pulled in and the only occupant piled out I saw I was in for considerable of a job. He was a great, towering fellow, with shoulders that looked as wide as a Percheron's hips. I'm free to confess if it hadn't been for that half-child there so close to me I'd have resigned right then. As it was I waited for him to come past.

But I did cut out my original heroic intention of confronting the gentleman melodramatically and demanding his surrender. Instead, I foully assaulted him with a leap from behind that landed me on his shoulders before he knew I was on earth. That threw him, despite his best efforts.

If the Lord is good to me I'll never have another fight like that one. This guy must have outweighed me forty pounds. All he had to do to squelch my science was to roll over on me occasionally. I'd argue no more about the offensive.

Moreover, he'd never heard of the rules of civilized warfare. But I cured him of a propensity to bite by a few grabs at the long whiskers I found he wore. After that he fought a little fairer, but maybe it was because he felt me weakening. I could feel myself going and didn't see how he could fail to notice it. What few thinks I had time for told me I'd need a lot of assistance to help me let go of this man-bear.

The assistance came just about the time I was wanting it most, when for the first time the big man was definitely on top of me. I didn't know till afterward, but it took the form of a stiff bump on his noodle, delivered by his affectionate little daughter with a loaded old whisky bottle she had brought along, behind her dress, for emergencies such as this.

I felt the man crumple on me and had barely strength enough to crawl out from under him. With the girl doing all the thinking and telling me every knot to tie,

we had the big fellow staked to the ground long before he came to.

As I sat there on the ground, panting beside our hogtied victim, I thought of something that hadn't occurred to me before. He hadn't fought like a drunken man.

Fact was, he fought like about six entirely sober men. But his first words, when his blinking in the dim light of the lantern the girl had brought showed he was coming to, proved he was a moonshiner. With a string of blankety blanks, he said:

"You whisky sleuths thinks you got me, but you got a long ways to go yit before ever you put me in jail to stay."

"Why, paw!" piped up the girl.

"Who you pawing?" The man on the ground wallowed around wildlike.

"See"—the girl turns to me—"he don't even know his own little Susie when he gets in that horrible condition."

The prisoner had another fit.

"Susie, nothing! I ain't got no kids," he roared.

"Why, paw, you know I'm your own little Susie Broadbent," she told him softly.

He'd have bit off about four fingers of the hand she extended caressingly toward him if I hadn't jerked it back for her. Then I put my own face in jeopardy, getting close to his. I wanted a good whiff of his breath.

"This fellow ain't drunk," I told Susie.

"Ain't you wise! 'Course I ain't," he proclaims, getting madder and madder.

"Poor paw! So many years of boozing has gone to his head," she commented.

"My head! My head—just turn me loose one minute, mister, while I whale that pesky brat for claiming me for a dad!" he pleaded.

I felt his knots again to make sure he was all right and then I led the girl back to the old beer hall to get some breakfast, for it was glimmering in the east. I was afraid that bewhiskered old reprobate would have a stroke of apoplexy if we stuck around.

"He's dead set he won't own you for his kid," I says to make conversation, over the leavings from my grub basket.

"He's a idjit," she announced.

"Maybe," I answered.

"What 'd you mean, maybe?" Again

there was the old snap in her voice. "You doubting it?"

"I wouldn't say so out loud, if I was," I replied as I dodged out of the door.

I started down to the man on the river bank, wanting to hold private converse with him. But the girl came along. There the three of us sat until plumb daylight and long after, nobody saying a word, just glaring at each other in mutual suspicion. Along about eleven o'clock there was a painful *chug-chugging* coming up the river that I recognized. The gang was coming back. I perched on a bulkhead and raised the signal of surrender and distress. They steered in.

On the prow with the boat hook was Harry Thomas, who is a deputy sheriff. I was glad he was still along, for I'd been counting on Harry. I could turn my prisoner over to him. The girl, I figured, would be about enough for me to look after.

She was standing beside her paw on the ground where he was tied when the boat pulled in, but all of a sudden, when I happened to look around, she turned up missing.

"Holy smoke! What you got here?" Harry says, looking at the prisoner like he was a museum exhibit he'd come miles to see. "Old Wambold himself!"

"Old Wambold!" My legs began to get shaky and I could feel my face turning chalky. Old Wambold was the most notorious bootlegging moonshiner in the State. He was reputed to have killed three officers and no one knew how many private enemies. "Quit your joking," I finished, mighty limp.

"Old Wambold is no joke," Harry said, poking at him playfully with a foot. "Are you, Wammy?"

The bound man spit at him spitefully. I tried to perk up a little of my oozing spunk.

"He's 'most as snappy as his little girl that was here a minute ago," I managed to say, wondering how I happened to be alive and feeling of myself, quietly, to see if I was all there.

"If you mean Nancy Grey, that just dodged behind those pines, she's about as far from being Wambold's daughter as I am from being his godfather," Harry went

on. "Come on out, Nancy, and meet the gentleman."

"I haven't any stockings on and I'm right modest," came from behind the tree in a voice I knew, but could hardly recognize, it had suddenly become so civilized, if you get my meaning.

All the same she came out, really blushing, and I realized for the first time how pretty she would be if she was rigged up with regular feminine togs and war paint.

"Miss Nancy Grey, may I present my friend Mr. Duffy McFie?" Harry introduced us. "Miss Grey used to be in the internal revenue service and now she's with the prohibition enforcement office. You ought to like Duffy, Miss Nancy. He's a heedless individual."

"So I found out, and I do."

She gave me her hand and I took it, but I was no ways satisfied for having been steered up against sudden death as personified by old Wambold, just to gratify some whim of this masquerading little, little—well, she was just what I thought her at first, little she-devil.

But on the way up the river on the launch, with old Wambold cursing up in the bow because the law had him at last, she tried to make amends.

"The men that were to come and help me didn't show up," she said as we sat together, apart from the rest. "So when I saw the unconcerned way you took it when they pitched you off this boat, I decided I'd try to use you.

"I had on this disguise that I wear in getting around the country, so I determined to play on your sympathy in helping me get rid of his stuff, anyhow, whether I caught him or not. I was afraid to do the job alone for fear there were traps around it and I'd get caught in one, all alone. I do hate the stuff so badly I wanted to destroy it if we could do nothing more. I didn't let you touch the still because it was too good evidence if he ever was arrested.

"But when I saw how willing you were to help, I concluded to try and catch the old sinner, anyhow, without the other officers. I knew I was putting you in a tight place. But I was going into it with you, and I made up my mind that you wouldn't

get any worse out of it than I did myself. You sure are a nervy man, Mr. Duffy McFie. I'll get you a job in our service if you'll take it."

I felt a warm glow all over. Those chances I had taken seemed well rewarded. All the same I said:

"No, thanks. I'll stick to the hardware store. The dryer the goods I handle in future the better suited I'm going to be."

IV.

I DIDN'T stay long at the store, though. A newspaper headline and a young woman lifted me out. There might have been twenty customers in the place while I was reading that front-page story in the afternoon paper. I let the other clerks handle them and stood riveted by the show case where I'd happened to glance at the rag. Why shouldn't it hypnotize me? There it was in big black letters:

FIGHTING WAMBOLD ESCAPES

Noted Murderer and Moonshiner, Sent to Capitol Grounds Through Mistake, Eludes His Armed Guards.

I felt a kind of tremble run through my pins. Did this son-of-the-mountain-dew know who had been responsible for his capture. By all accounts he was a vindictive cuss.

"I'd like to look at automatics, please."

I jumped. I hadn't realized that I had stopped in front of the gun counter, for I work in a hardware store. But it wasn't merely the notion of guns fitting in so nicely with my thoughts that made me start. I knew that voice. To make sure I took a full look at the speaker.

There was no mistake, it was Miss Nancy Grey. I knew her in a minute, though I hadn't seen her for three weeks, and then she was barefooted, in the disguise of a river girl, whereas now she was a walking model of all that's new in feminine fashion. But I had the advantage of her—she didn't seem to know me at all.

I had shown her two or three guns—she wanted a small size, but not a toy—when I ventured to jog her memory.

"Are you going after our friend Wammy again or just getting ready for him to go after you, Susie?" I inquired as brash as you please.

She jerked her head up to look at me with a surprised expression and I noticed she kept her eyes on my face like something fascinated her.

"I didn't know you, Mr. Duffy McFie," she laughed. "Why should I?"

I got her and stroked the little beard I had started right after the river fracas and which had done right well for three weeks' growth.

"Why did you do it?" she demanded, and I suspected that only politeness was stifling a laugh at my expense.

"Insulting remarks from the other clerks to the effect that it couldn't be done. Do you approve of the result?"

"Immensely."

"All's well that ends well," I said. "It 'll be a good disguise now that our friend Wammy is on the warpath again." I laughed sort of foolish and wondered if she'd suspect it was because I was afraid of Wambold that I'd let the atrocity grow on my face. "I gathered he didn't like either of us overmuch," I finished lamely.

"I reckon not," she agreed.

"So you come in after a regular gun, in preparation?" I tried to question her.

She was too sharp for me, though. Her smile said nothing as she asked:

"Have you one yourself?"

"You think I'll need it?"

She was studying my face again, but I had a feeling she was looking at the new beard I'd raised, rather than trying to figure out whether I was nervous about old Wambold. However, she said:

"One never can tell. It might worry me if I were tied down here in the city like you are. But I am off on a trip to the mountains." She hesitated and again her glance turned from the guns she was examining to my face. "Haven't changed your mind about joining the law enforcement department, have you? A little bunch of us are going up to the Blue Ridge after a still we have a tip on. Better go along."

"What do you want me for, when you can see so plainly how scared I am of Wam-

bold? I'd make a hot officer!" I said, feeling a little sheepish.

"You aren't afraid of Wambold?" she challenged. "You licked him once in a fair fight. What you are afraid of is Wambold's general reputation for cussedness."

"Whatever it is, it bothers me to think of that old reprobate running loose here in the city," I told her. "Yes, I think I'll turn revenuer—or whatever you call yourselves now. It 'll give me a chance to get away from that moonshiner's vicinity, for I presume he'll go back to his old river haunts."

V.

THERE were three of us going up on the train, three of us in the auto in which we rode to the village where we ourselves became mountain folks to all outward appearance and three of us on horseback, working back into the little known but far from unsettled stretches of the Blue Ridge. The three were Miss Nancy Grey, who once more wore the gingham dress and displayed the muddy toes that first introduced her to me; myself, thanking the hunch which had made me grow whiskers, for they sure did lend a countrified air to my phiz; and old Deacon Crosby, as we christened him. Deacon was fat and lumbering, but he had a quick eye and a sturdy figure for all his sixty years. His nose was reputed as capable of sniffing liquor at a distance of five miles.

The job ahead listened simple. These two old-timers in the service knew the location of a hidden distillery, but they didn't know who owned it, which was rather an important point in making convictions. It hadn't been worked for several months, they knew, because one after another operator of their office had kept a cautious eye on it from a proper distance and disguise. Now they'd reached the conclusion, they told me, that the still might be a stall.

That is, they had it figured that somebody in that neck of woods was hep to the fact that this particular still was spotted and was letting it set there unused, a bright spot, while he, she or they worked another one that was better concealed. All we had to do was locate the other one!

This was a long way from the city, where Wambold had cut loose, and I was drawing down more money than I got in the hardware store, with only moderate prospect of getting plugged through the liver with a bullet from some ex-Confederate rifle saved sixty years for that gladsome purpose. So why should I worry if we had to put in all summer hunting that still. Wasn't I in pretty good company, I'd ask myself as I looked at Nancy's muddy toes and glimpsed the twinkle in her eyes when she caught me at it.

The consolation of disguise which my whiskers gave me in our first few days of touring around through the hills, pretending to look for a farm to settle on, was nothing to the joy they seemed to afford my companions. My dad and my sister Susie—to be exact, the old deacon and Nancy—got a lot of quiet snickers out of the whiskers of Stonewall Jackson Morrison, which was me. I was pretending to be wearing my first pair of shoes and powerful uncomfortable in them, too, as I'd explain to the mountain folks when I'd take them off frequently to rest my feet, as I said. If my whiskers were funny, Susie had to admit my contortions over my shoes were clever.

They were forever poking sly jokes at me about hiding behind a red flag, they being pleased to insinuate that that was the shade of my facial ornaments. When I remonstrated once they admitted that perhaps the color did incline toward pink. After that I let it go at red.

We had been in the mountains two days, all our possessions in ratty old saddlebags that were part of the props we had brought along with our outlandish clothes, when the deacon and I lost Nancy, or Susie as we were calling her. We had gone ahead, sending her around past the place where we knew the still was located, because it seemed that a woman in the vicinity would be less likely to create suspicion than a couple of strange men.

When the girl turned up missing at the rendezvous, the deacon did not manifest any of the concern that immediately seized me.

"Keep cool, young fellow," he counseled. "She hit a trail or something and had to follow it. Thing for us to do is sit tight

and wait for her. Yonder's a right prosperous looking cabin—maybe they've got a chicken that hain't been run bony by the hogs. I could use a little good chicken in place of this sowbelly, sowbelly, sowbelly, morning, noon and night, that we been subsisting on. Let's drift over and sound out the old lady before the men come down from that tomato patch on the hills. Maybe we can talk her into giving us a shakedown for the night and we'll just rest here."

"And let that girl maybe go drifting by? Not me," I objected, exceedingly serious. I hadn't a thought of love for Nancy, she was too wise and independent; she scared me a little. Perhaps it was because I saw here a chance to prove she did need a man to help her out, that I was so concerned.

"Hell, boy, that girl's more'n likely to turn up to save us from trouble we don't know we're blundering into," the deacon remonstrated. "You and me don't need worry none about her. She knows this country better'n I do and she's better able to take care of herself in a pinch. By your own tell, it was a bump on old Wambold's noodle from her that made a hero out of you."

I had to admit the logic of his reasoning and went along with him to interview the woman who was washing down by the branch, according to the custom of the country. She had things rigged up right fine, with a stone fireplace for her boiler and a regular wringer such as few mountaineers can afford.

"Can you eat us and give us a roof, missis?" the deacon asked in the lingo of the land which was his native tongue.

"Be you-all tomato men?" she inquired, suspicious.

It had been strange to me to see how many tomato canneries, little contraptions in old log cabins, we had come on in the mountains. They were run with decrepit old steam engines, the power generated with pine wood. Everywhere were tomato patches; the poor devils of farmers could sell their canned tomatoes, whereas they had to use their own corn and hogs and never had any cash from the other crops.

The deacon had maintained to me, when I spoke of it, that the lowly tomato was re-

juvenating the Southern hills, and I reckon he was correct. There is nothing like a little ready money to cure provincialism. Some of these people were actually going out to the county seat once or twice a year, now that their canneries had shown them the way. Also they were spending their ready money for dry nation booze, guaranteed to make this a promising land for young practitioners of medicinal arts.

It didn't surprise me at all when the deacon came back at the woman with an avowal that we were, indeed, tomato men, trying to contract the output of the little mountain canneries, but lack of surprise didn't prevent my worrying over this new rôle. Up to now we'd been prospective farmers from farther south looking for cheap land. I knew little enough, Lord knows, about farming, but my only acquaintance with canned tomatoes was after they emerged from the can.

But the deacon had an oily tongue and it wasn't much later that we were sitting out in front of the cabin waiting for the hour of supper and congratulating ourselves that we had been so slow coming through the hills that we hadn't much longer to wait for dusk and eats. We knew those men hoeing tomatoes up on the hillside would not lay off until it was plumb dark. They may only work a short part of the year, those mountaineers, but they sure do work while they are at it. The woman, her name was Young, was apologetic over being caught washing at such an hour of the day.

"With three extra men to eat, Lawd knows I don't git no time to do it Monday mornings no more, particular when it rains every Monday," she explained.

"Now you got two more, but don't let it worry you none, we ain't goin' to stay only to-night, to git a line on the canneries round here," the deacon told her.

"I know right well you ain't," she agreed with a toothless grin. "We-all ain't goin' to turn nobody away hungry, but we done contracted our tomatoes a'ready. Leastwise, so I heard the old man saying," she hastened to add. Mountaineers handle their business affairs, if they may be said to have any, without the help of their women folks.

She was dead right, though, about the prospects of our short visit. The men, while

not exactly hostile, were an up-and-down mile from being friendly. They had absolutely nothing to say when they blew in, except that old Young himself shortly informed the deacon that he'd contracted to sell his tomatoes after they were put up on shares as was the cannery's system.

The deacon, who seemed to have no nerves at all, went into the kitchen-dining room, living room, bedroom, where the men were sitting around waiting for their chuck, to discuss the matter further. But I was well satisfied to stay outdoors, straining my eyes up the road for Miss Nancy and wishing I'd stuck by the hardware store, braving old Wambold's possible revenge. I hated to admit it to myself, but I would have had a lot easier feeling if that girl had been there—I felt the need of her lightning brain. It was plain to be seen that this gang did not entirely fall for our tomato alibi.

But no sign of the girl appeared, and finally I answered the summons to "Set up" which echoed out of the cabin.

VI.

By the light of a smoky kerosene lamp I had my first chance to size up this bunch of mountaineers, and all through the inevitable feast of cornbread and pork I hated myself for a coward. Here I'd been quaking in my shoes at the fancied terribleness of mountain people, of which I had heard so much, where there wasn't an awe-inspiring galoot in the gang. There were simply stolidity, vacuity and whiskers. Particularly whiskers. I kept glancing at the only smooth face at the table, the old woman's, for relief, and poor comfort it was, too.

God, how I hated whiskers at the moment. My dislike for them seemed all mixed up with my distaste for this sort of grub and with displeasure over being such a nut as to have been afraid of this gang. It wasn't till I went to stroke my own face that I realized I was as unkempt as any of them, all hairy on my own phiz. I got up with a muttered curse and went outside, the rest of the gang looking after me, hostile.

I sat outside, in the light of a big, round moon, taking inventory of myself. That idea of how anxious I had been before sup-

per to have Miss Nancy show up kept biting into my soul. I was perfectly frank with myself. My anxiety had been chiefly for myself, not for her; I'd been plumb scared still of a bunch of mountaineers that didn't look like they had brains enough to raise anything but whiskers, not even tomatoes. I had even gone to the ignominious depths of raising hair on my own face and of using it to hide behind from such as they.

That girl officer, I reflected, must have seen something rich in those damn whiskers of mine. As I recalled it, she'd sort of formed the habit of looking at them in a fascinated way. I'd thought it was because they were funny looking, which I had to confess was the truth, but now I believed I could penetrate deeper into her thoughts. She had been speculating on the chicken-heartedness that must have raised them in an effort to hide from old Wambold. I honestly hadn't grown them with any such idea, I never had a hunch that the moonshiner would get loose—but who was going to believe that?

Suddenly I realized that if I wasn't in love with this girl I had a natural masculine aversion to having her think of me as afraid of anything that walked on two or four legs, flew in the air or navigated the seas. The appearance of the deacon put an end to my bitter cogitations.

"Damn you!" he murmured. "You nearly gummed the cards for me. I had to make a fresh start. Don't you know better than to scorn any people's food?"

"It wasn't their food. It was their faces," I came back.

But he didn't get me at all—he wore whiskers himself. Disdaining to continue the subject he says:

"I'm going to go down and inspect their cannery—they invited me to, after I got 'em warmed up a little on the respective merits of this and the next county in the matter of canned tomatoes. You better stay here and keep an eye out for the girl."

"I may turn in early," I objected. "You said Susie would be all right."

"Sure, she will be. Just shinny up the ladder to the loft when you get ready and take your pick of shakedown. Old lady says she laid out two for us."

He lit his corncob pipe and went off with the men, little dreaming of the desperate resolve to which my whisker-tortured soul had given birth. I proposed to shave right here and now. How I was going to do it I didn't know, not possessing a razor and having no time or taste for pulling the individual hairs out by the roots. But shaved I was going to be just the same. There must be a razor somewhere around this dump. I'd interview the old lady on the subject.

I went back into the cabin. The dim oil light was still burning, but the woman wasn't in sight. Looking out the back door I saw a lantern moving around the log barn and heard chickens protesting. My heart rejoiced. Could it be I was going to encounter chicken again in an edible form? With a shave and real food in me, I would again become a regular human being.

I cast a speculative eye over the cabin. It wouldn't do to go poking around here, shot-on-sight would be the reward I would get if I was caught at it. But my eye could rove for that needed razor if my hands and feet had to be still. Nothing rewarded the anxious glances.

Everything was fairly clean and shipshape; the woman was neater about her house than the men were about their appearance. Across part of one end of the room hung a curtain from a built-out shelf, making a closet of sorts. It occurred to me to wonder how people so far back in the mountains happened to have so many "other clothes" that they needed a closet like that. Of course, this was a more prosperous cabin than most hereabouts, still its inhabitants didn't look like they would run to fancy duds. I almost forgot my wild desire for a shave in puzzling over this.

The more I looked, the more I wondered what they wanted of that closet. And the more I wondered the more I wanted to know. Agonized poultry cries from out back told me that the drama of some chicken's life was fast approaching its climax. Boldly, which was the only way to do it, I braved sudden death, got up, drifted aimlessly over to that side of the room and raised the curtains. A little clothing hung there and behind, in orderly rows, stood two

or three hundred cans of tomatoes, all labeled. I dropped the curtain and got back outdoors.

The thing seemed simple enough now—evidently these people were capable of a little sharp dealing themselves. They had probably held out those cans on their last year's sale, putting in short cases, and were keeping them hid to sell with this year's output. Its diversion gone, my mind went back to the fuzz on my phiz.

I heard the woman busying herself at the rear of the cabin and went around.

"Where can I get a razor?" I asked without preliminaries.

She straightened up from the chicken she was picking, with as near an expression of surprise as her constitution permitted.

"Lawsy, ain't you gone down to the cannery with the rest of 'em?" she says.

"No, I been sitting out in front all the time," I told her. "I heard you killing the chicken and was darn glad of it. Have your husband or the boys got a razor?"

"I reckon so. What for you want a razor? Goin' to a party?" She liked the joke and cackled over it. The mountain people haven't much use for blacks, but they have a few coon wheezes they fancy.

"I'm going to shave," I told her.

"I'll get it for you," she says, almost too willing, it seemed to me.

I had an interesting spectator. The idea of a full grown man shaving himself was evidently a big novelty to the mountain woman. By the feel of the razor it hadn't been used for several generations, and the soft soap wasn't any too caressing to my rosy cheek. The deed done, I went up the ladder to the shakedown, not caring to waste the deacon's surprise in a half light, preferring to reserve it for morning.

I was nearly asleep when he rolled in beside me, but by that time my recent act had been forgotten by worrying again over Nancy Grey, and I whispered to him:

"See anything of the girl?"

"No. I told you she's all right. Say, this bunch may not look like much, but they've got the best cannery in the mountains, down there in the hollow. Right good machinery and a man up from the city to run it for them. He eats here, too,

though he was too busy to come up to supper. I tell you, the tomato is going to civilize this section."

The deacon was so enthusiastic over what he'd seen poking around with those men that he was positively garrulous. He might, in reality, have been what he posed as, a tomato buyer, instead of a moonshine sniffer. I finally had to tell him point blank to shut up and let me sleep.

VII.

HAVING been the first one to bed it was natural that I should be the last one up. The night was chilly, and I covered my head with the blanket, as is my pleasing personal custom, with the result that I didn't see the light poking in through the chinks of the loft. The first thing I knew was the deacon bellowing up the ladder that I better hurry if I expected to get anything to eat. I rolled out and down, for toilet preparations were a simple matter.

The deacon was sitting with his back to the ladder. He turned to glance at me and his head stayed riveted that way while he stared like he was hypnotized by my smooth countenance. The others were studying me, too, but there was no surprise about them; probably the old woman had told them I'd gone crazy and shaved.

The man sitting beside the deacon turned, too, to look at me, and I, on my part, stared at him. He was smooth-faced, also. Moreover, there was something familiar about him. I couldn't spot the sense of familiarity for a minute and by that time I was down and off the ladder. Then I realized that what I recognized was the glare with which he was regarding me. The next instant I was fighting for my life, trying to keep old Wambold from choking me.

The deacon jumped for the smooth-faced man, who was Wambold, almost as soon as he jumped for me. But the rest of the gang were after the deacon, and I was under a pyramid of humanity higher than any mountain in this range. But I was doing fairly well. From previous experience I knew Wambold's tactics in hand-to-hand encounter and beat him to the bite.

Two or three shots rang out and gradual-

ly the pile of flesh disintegrated into its component parts. I lay still on the ground, unhurt but powerful winded, and looked up. Nancy Grey, or Susie I better say because she had on her Susie costume, was standing in the doorway, in her hand the smoking automatic I had sold her. At the other door was a man in civilized garb. He, too, held a smoking gun.

One of the mountaineers was letting out groans that showed he was not hurt much. Another of them, even I could see, never would be hurt again. Wambold was standing in the corner with his hands above his head. It was easy enough to be sure he was Wambold, even if he did have a clean shave. Nancy was gazing at my phiz, fascinated again.

"So it was you spilled the beans," she said slow and distinct. "Shaved!"

I was too busy with wanting to know what all this was about to bother with resenting whatever the insinuation meant.

"What is the big idea?" I demanded.

The deacon spoke up, between pantings for breath, as befuddled, apparently, as I was myself.

"Are they the gang?" he said. "Why, I put in two hours last night down at their cannery and I didn't see anything wrong. Honest, I thought they were on the level."

"You'd have found out if you had taken this bright little officer with you," Susie waved at me. "He'd have identified the canner as Wambold for you—that is, if it was before he exposed himself with a razor. That's what we brought him along for, to point out old Wambold to you."

"So you put me up against that guy again, unsuspected!" I almost shouted, for I was pretty hot over it. "You seem mighty careless with my bones."

"How was I to know you'd be fool enough to shave. You were safe with that fuzz on your face. I didn't know you myself first time I saw it," she answered. Then she forgot me to ask: "Didn't you find a thing suspicious, deacon?"

"No," he answered slowly, watching the stoical mountain woman and an uninjured man tying up a flesh wound on the arm of the hollering fellow. "Of course, they may have a cellar under the cannery with a still

in it. But the place looked so businesslike and they had such good machinery I was sure it wasn't what we were looking for. Besides, there were no canned goods around."

"What do you mean, canned goods?" I demanded with a gleam of intelligence.

"There have been thousands of quarts of illicit booze shipped out of these mountains to all parts of the country, billed as tomatoes," Nancy deigned to explain, apparently feeling she had been a little hard on me. "About one can in a case would be full of fire water. They can't make the hooch all at once; must be some around somewhere for this is the place—or Wambold wouldn't be here, would you, darling?"

Wammy cursed most alarmingly, but the man in the other doorway, whom I knew now must be another liquor law enforcement officer had him covered close. I stood up.

"Maybe I have spilled the beans for you," I said. "I'll now spill the booze, and a little of it is going down my own throat, dry nation or not."

I meandered over to the curtain and pulled it down with a jerk, throwing the few clothes after it, thus exposing the piled-up cans. Before they could stop me I had jabbed my knife into the top of one of them at two places, for the most satisfying drink I had had since prohibition reared his long-haired head.

"You do have your uses," Nancy conceded, giving me a slap of approbation on my shoulder, the way a man might have.

"Even if I am temperamental and can only stand a beard just so long?" I asked, forgiving her with a laugh.

"Well, if I did put you into danger, it was because I knew you were capable of meeting it, no matter what you thought of yourself," she said sharply, and I seemed to feel my stature grow a couple of inches. "The officer and I have been shadowing this place ever since you two arrived yesterday. You see, I didn't dare show myself because Wambold, if he was here, would be sure to recognize me, whereas he would not have known you probably before you shaved. The deacon had never seen Wambold. That's why we brought you along, to point out the bird to the deacon."

"But what made you think Wambold was up here in these mountains?" I demanded.

"Because we let him escape on purpose so he would lead us here," she explained. "We've been suspecting him of connection with the mountain gang right along."

VIII.

It wasn't till nearly dusk that we got the hooch loaded up on a government wagon that had been sent for and started out. Nancy and I rode a little in the rear. I drew in close beside her as I saw the moon

peeking up over the Blue Ridge. It came to me all of a sudden that the kind of "Moonshine Medicine" I had been singing about down there on the James, that seemed so long ago, wasn't the kind I had been meaning then at all.

"You like bold men, don't you, child, even if they don't know they're bold themselves," I whispered, and slipped my arm around her while our horses drew close.

"If you think you're being bold now you're missing our guess," she whispered back. "I'm tired of having every one think I'm just an officer when I'm really all girl. Let's sing 'Moonshine Medicine' together."

THE END.



THE NOVICE

OH, Life, I think, is like a game of bridge—
 I do not know the rules—yet earnestly
 I try to learn from teachers who are wise
 But—strange, somehow, no two of them agree!

"Keep the conventions—never break the rules!"
 Says number one. "That is the thing to do—
 Those who would break them are but silly fools!"
 "Play your own game!" advises number two.

"Lead trumps right out!" advises number three,
 But number four admonishes me, "Nay,
 It's better far to use them cautiously—
 Conserve your strength—that is the better way!"

"The game's a partnership!" another says.
 "Do what your partner signals you to do!"
 "Go it alone!" another still instructs—
 Which one is right? Ah, me, if I but knew!

Meantime the game awaits, and nervously
 I sort my cards. Ah, now it is my turn!
 Shall I remain a novice evermore?
 When teachers disagree, how shall I learn?

Roselle Mercier Montgomery



The Apes of Devil's Island

By JOHN CUNNINGHAM

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

JIMMY WENDELL, just out of college, goes on a yachting trip with Dr. and Mrs. Meredith, their daughter, Eleanor; Nicky, their twelve-year-old son, who has occasional spells of savage cruelty, and Dr. Grame, a friend. Some one on board tries to throw George, a sailor, overboard. Jimmy suspects Nicky. While on deck Jimmy himself is struck and thrown over. Despite sharks, he reaches a small island. Later Eleanor drifts on a raft to the same island and tells how the yacht was wrecked on a reef. In the night Jimmy is clubbed unconscious and Eleanor disappears.

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAD SUSPICION.

MY first reaction was amazement and incredulity. I could not realize that anything had happened. However, the empty pallet before me was a clamorous proof that Eleanor was not where she should have been, and the ache in my head told me that I had been dealt a heavy blow.

As I rose to my feet a rapid fire of questions ran through my mind. What had struck me on the head? What had become of Eleanor? Was she near by or far away? A hasty survey of the clearing disclosed no signs of the missing girl. Everything, except the tumbled and wrecked pallet, was just as it had been the night before.

Lifting my voice, I called Eleanor's name loudly. The mass of waving green mangroves seemed to devour the sound, for no

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echo came back, and the stillness was even greater than before.

After shouting for several minutes without a response, I flung myself down on the ground and fell to reviling myself for having fallen asleep at my post. Eleanor had been in my care, and I had betrayed my trust. If I had only stayed awake!

Action, the natural reaction of remorse, brought me to my feet again. A thorough search of the island, which lasted till long after sunrise, produced no results.

Something, or some one, had hit me on the head while I slept; the same thing must have carried Eleanor away. The thought of the mysterious object I had seen moving through the trees the night before kept returning to my mind. Could it have been a man?

The memory of my bitten toe and the dream connected with it came to my thoughts more than once. At last I determined to give up conjecturing as to what had happened, and turn my entire attention to recovering Eleanor.

Of one thing I was practically certain: Eleanor was not on Devil's Island. Therefore, she was either dead and in the ocean, or had been taken to the group of islands I had noticed before.

As I saw it now, there was only one course to pursue—to make one more tour of the island and then head my raft for the keys to the west.

So I sat down and hurriedly bolted some of the roast fish that remained from our supper of the night before. I realized that I must eat to provide the strength I would surely need for the day that lay ahead of me.

When I had finished my scant meal, I turned my attention to Eleanor's bed, which showed every sign that a struggle had taken place on it. Making a careful search, I found the revolver and cartridge belt under the pile of palm fiber; a discovery which, needless to say, filled me with the greatest joy. For many things are possible to an armed man that would be hopeless for one with empty hands.

To be quite frank, I was afraid to think of the danger Eleanor might be in. I had done enough thinking; it was time for ac-

tion now. Making one more rapid tour of the island, I came to our raft, and at last embarked on the run I had been contemplating ever since my arrival at this island of surprises.

My shirt turned out to be an admirable sail. The wind was slight, but the raft slid smoothly along with the waves sloshing against its sides. To be absolutely alone is a disquieting feeling. As I looked into the dark depths of the water all about me, I shivered. Who knew what might not exist down there? My imagination painted pictures of sharks of unheard-of lengths, with ravenous appetites. The serpents of nursery tales did not seem at all improbable now.

I sat as nearly in the middle of the raft as possible, in order to be at the greatest distance from the water. How I craved a companion! If Eleanor had been with me, I would have been the happiest man in the world. The day was just warm enough to be pleasant, and the salty tang of the sea could not efface the balminess of the breeze.

As I said before, the raft was really making very good progress. We were getting nearer and nearer to the group of islands. It was evident that they were of quite different nature from the one I had left. Although part of the shore line was overhung with mangroves, yet there were long stretches of sandy beach to be seen.

The interior of the islands seemed to be from thirty to forty feet above the level of the sea. Instead of the marshy, mangrove-covered Devil's Island, I knew enough to expect a dense forest of tropical trees—almost a jungle. Here would be animal life. I wondered whether such a place would be very safe. At all events, it would be far more comfortable than on the lower islands.

If my guess was correct, Eleanor was on one of these islands. On the whole, my chances of rescuing her were very good. I was armed with a revolver and about fifty cartridges. If I could not render a good account of myself under such conditions, I would indeed be a poor excuse for a man.

My gaze wandered incessantly from is-

land to island, from cove to cove. There ought to be some visible signs that would hint at her whereabouts. And my guess was not incorrect. In the sky above the largest of the keys was a dirty streak which looked very much like smoke. Using a loose board as a rudder, I began to steer the raft, since the wind was not blowing in quite the direction I wished to go. Luckily I was sufficiently versed in the ways of sailing to know that I would have to head above the desired spot, since we would make a great deal of leeway.

The sun hung above the rim of the ocean; before long it would be dark. By this time the smudge could definitely be made out as smoke. My excitement may be imagined. Somewhere on that island was Eleanor, with Heaven knew whom. It was my task to get her under my protection again. Goodness knows, it had been of little enough avail on Devil's Island; but I was determined that if I found her once more I would not lose her again.

There was one point that gave me not a little concern. Suppose I had been seen from the island? If I had, and my enemy were armed, it would be the easiest thing in the world for him to lie among the bushes on the shore and shoot me dead as I landed. On the other hand, he might take Eleanor and move quietly to another island. I wondered how conspicuous my raft and I were from the shore. There was no doubt that we had been seen if any one had been watching the ocean carefully.

After thinking the matter over for a considerable time, I chose a plan that seemed to meet all the exigencies of the situation. There was a small island some three or four hundred yards from the larger one. If I could reach this island unseen, it would be very easy to swim to my destination in the twilight, at which time I would be hardly visible.

If I should slide into the water now, and cling to the end of the raft, I would be absolutely invisible from land. I followed out the plan immediately, first laying the pistol, cartridges and match case on the raft. Then I clung to the rear edge and aided the sail by kicking with my feet; but I was careful to keep in the cool brine

to avoid splashing. Even if any one should see the raft, he would see nothing on it, and conclude it to be a derelict floating about.

My fear of the depths below left me when I was actually in the water. Besides, I had more important things to think of. Eleanor was somewhere in that jungle, doubtless in danger. What time had I to conjure up nameless terrors of the sea?

The rest of the journey to the small island was without event. I chose a small bay into which to guide the raft. Knowing that I might have future need of this primitive boat, I pulled it in among the roots of the mangroves. I was not satisfied to leave it until it was so thoroughly entangled that there was no chance of it floating away with the tide.

Before setting out to reconnoiter the large island, I paused to observe the general lay of the land. Through the branches of the mangroves could be seen a long white beach that stretched to my right—away from Large Island, as I called it.

To the left nothing was visible but twisting trees. In the opposite direction from Large Island was another key, with a great crescent-shaped shore line. In my own mind I named this Crescent Island.

As I was admiring the long stretch of white beach I was given cause for surprise. For there curling above the top of the foliage was an unmistakable wisp of smoke. My gaze was glued on it for some time. There was no mistaking it. There was a fire on this island too! Perhaps this stream of vapor was the real clew to Eleanor's whereabouts. It was difficult to decide which island should be visited first. However, I decided upon Large Island, for no other reason than that it was the first one I had seen. I determined that if nothing turned up there I would return immediately to Crescent Island.

The sun was on the point of setting, but I could count on long twilight. I set out along the coast toward Large Island, which was not visible from my side of Small Island.

Traveling through the mangroves was slow work; so I gave up the land and swam across the narrow channel that skirted the

shore. Separated from the island by deep water was a shallow bar which ran parallel to the coast. The water was about knee-deep, and I was able to make very good progress. The bar was evidently part of a coral reef, for the bottom was rocky and uneven, scarred with pockets from which protruded many crayfish antennæ. As I had no other food with me than a piece of coconut and a bit of cooked fish, I set about the capture of a couple of these tropical lobsters. Having pocketed the results of my foraging operations, I continued my way.

Ahead of me was a small promontory. I judged that this was the end of the island, and Large Island would soon be visible. As I drew near I noticed something in the water a little to my left.

It was a dark-brown object, and at first sight appeared to be a shark. It did not move, but bobbed up and down as the ripples rolled against it. I was too curious to pass it up without an investigation; and, as it looked perfectly harmless, approached it, but with great caution and with a loaded gun in my hand.

When I drew nearer I saw that it was a large, hairy body, no doubt drowned. My imagination was fired, and I raced toward it, forgetting all thoughts of my previous weariness. I stumbled once in a rock pocket, and narrowly escaped dousing the pistol. Cooled off by my accident, I continued more calmly.

The sight I saw on reaching the object was fearful. It was a large monkey, bloated and extended. I judged it had been dead a couple of days. As I wondered what had been the cause of its death, I noticed something near its head. I leaned over and looked more closely.

There, with its jaws clamped into the monkey's arm, was what seemed to be an enormous eel. Its body must have been from eight to ten inches through. I knew what it was. A moray! I had heard of them before, and had even caught a small one on a hook and line once. They are salt water eels, with massive jaws and long teeth that slant back toward the throat. If they once get their teeth into anything—so it is said—they cannot let go, because

of the back-slanting teeth. At any rate, whether they can or whether they can't, they *don't* let go.

I had often heard stories of their seizing the foot of some poor fisherman who unwittingly trod upon them, and holding fast till the tide had risen, and the fisherman had drowned. I had never believed these stories, but here was proof. Only about two feet of the moray was outside his rock pocket; the rest of his body was on the inside. It would have taken a team of horses to move the thing.

They have a peculiar habit of tying their bodies into all kinds of knots. I knew this, because I saw it done by the small one I once captured. Whether they tie themselves into a knot around a rock inside their hole, I do not know. However, it is impossible to get them out.

The skin and surface flesh of the moray was in shreds. The ape had evidently put up a good fight, for the moray too was dead. I conjectured that the monkey had reached his arm into the rock pocket after a crayfish, and had disturbed the moray. The huge eel had seized the arm and pulled the ape under. The ape had drowned, but while doing so had inflicted such punishment on the moray that it could not survive.

It is needless to say that I decided to make the rest of my journey over the mangrove roots. I made my way cautiously to the shore, my mind full of tales of the ferocity of the salt water eel—how it will attack a boat if hooked; how poisonous its teeth are; that you have to break its back in three places to kill it, and so on. After I had reached the shore it was only a matter of a few minutes before I had come to the cape, and Large Island lay about two hundred yards away beyond a cut.

The smoke was still visible. It was impossible to say from what part of the island it was rising, but I judged the fire must be somewhere near the opposite shore.

Before letting myself into the water to begin the swim—I was in the mangrove branches, and the water below was over my head—I thought of the cartridges. Would they fire if wet? If the powder got damp, it was certain that they would not.

I did not know how water-tight the cases were, and was determined to run no more risks than necessary. I unfastened the cartridge belt, which I had been carrying around my neck when I encountered the moray and the dead monkey. Rolling it up as tightly as I could, I tied it with my handkerchief. Then I tore some strips from my shirt, and bound the rolled cartridge belt firmly to my head. When I was satisfied that it would not slip, I let myself down into the chilly water and set out for the other island.

The course of one's thoughts while swimming is curious indeed. I could not keep my attention on any one thing more than a moment at a time. My first thought was the possibility of the presence of sharks. Since my narrow escape it was always the first thing to come into my mind on entering the water. However, there was no particular reason why there should be any sharks in this cut, and if there were it was probable that they were only sand sharks. So I hoped for the best and continued on my way.

But what about the monkey? I had suspected their presence back on Devil's Island. The skeleton, the thing I saw while prowling around the night of Eleanor's disappearance, and the dream about Nicky biting my toe, all combined as significant in my mind. The marks of the bite had been visible the next morning. It was probably a little ape that had bitten me, and in my half conscious, half feverish condition I had dreamed it was Nicky. Then a terrible thought assailed me. Was it the apes who had stolen Eleanor?

Before long I was at the sandy beach, unstrapping the belt from my head. Somewhere before me, in the fast falling night, was Eleanor or a band of apes, or Heaven knows what!

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS.

LUCKILY for me, tropical twilight was long at that time of year. I started off through the mangroves at as rapid a pace as possible. I had a general idea

of the direction of the fire, and trusted to Providence to help me locate it.

Large Island was similar to Devil's Island, except the ground became higher and firmer more quickly. The undergrowth was dense; sand crabs were less numerous. The possibility of running across dangerous animals was not so remote, so I advanced with my pistol loaded and in my hand. However, I encountered no trouble.

Noises were audible on all sides, but I actually saw nothing except a small snake, which slid into the shadows as I approached. It was getting darker, and consequently more difficult to make rapid headway. After I covered about a mile, or what I thought was a mile, I began to wonder how much farther it was to the shore. It was almost dark, so I determined to climb a very tall tree which was near by, while I could still see.

Climbing up was no easy matter; it cost me two barked shins, and not a little time and hard work. But when I did arrive at the topmost branches my pains were rewarded. Only a few hundred yards away the sea stretched out darkly, and a little distance down the coast I could see a column of smoke swirling up from behind a mass of trees and foliage.

My descent was rapid, and I was soon on my way again. Now that I knew where I was going, I picked my way carefully and tried to avoid making noise. It was quite dark except for the faint light of the stars. Luckily I had a smattering knowledge of astronomy, picked up in the classroom at college, and was able to direct my steps with some accuracy, allowing the heavenly bodies to point the way. It was slow going. Time after time I bumped slowly into the trunk of a tree, and becoming entangled in vines and bushes was a matter of every other minute. But I pursued my way doggedly, as I had a definite goal ahead of me. At last a dim red glare was visible through the trees. There, I knew, was the fire. Who were around it?

I advanced now with even greater caution. I seemed hardly to be moving at all, so great was my desire not to give myself away by any noise. At last the fire was visible, only to be blotted out the next

moment by intervening foliage. But it came in sight again, and this time I could see the whole fire. As I drew nearer figures began to be visible; at first mere shadowy, shapeless bulks, moving here and there.

By this time I was on the edge of the hammock; ahead of me was sandy soil covered by a growth of thick, high grass. As I came nearer and nearer I was certain the forms moving about the fire were humans. I knew I had to come close enough to see the men's faces and hear their conversation. It was necessary to determine whether they were friends or enemies.

I crawled nearer and nearer, coming to within fifty feet of the fire. A low murmur of voices was audible, but the words themselves were lost. There were five people, all sitting with their backs toward me. One of them rose. It was a woman. She walked to the other side of the fire, but her face was not yet visible to me, since she was peering out over the somber sea. She stood thus for a while, and then turned. It was Mrs. Meredith!

Throwing all of my former caution to the winds, I breasted my way boldly enough through the high sedge, and called out Dr. Meredith's name. The sound of a human voice issuing from the unknown shadows that surrounded them seemed to electrify the little group. For a moment they remained as motionless as if they were frozen. Then the voice of Dr. Meredith answered: "Who is there?"

In a moment more I was among them. I was received like one returned from the dead. Mrs. Meredith cried and kissed me, Dr. Meredith shook my hand warmly, and Grame administered a huge thump on my back.

"We feared you were dead," said Dr. Grame.

"Well, I'm not," I returned; "so tell me how you happened to be here."

It is impossible to record the ensuing conversation. Naturally every one talked at once, and we heard each other's stories in fragments. When I asked where Eleanor and Nicky were, Mrs. Meredith burst into tears. I had decided not to speak of my finding Eleanor—it would have done no good, and would have only upset them. It

was better to let them think that their daughter was tossing around in the sea on a bit of wreckage, or even that she was drowned, rather than to inform them that she was in the power of some unknown person or thing somewhere in the darkness that lay all around us.

So I told my story, leaving out Eleanor's part in it, and heard their story, bit by bit. I had learned of the first part through Eleanor, so I will take it up from the time of the wreck. The Merediths, Dr. Grame and the sailor, George, were in one boat. The captain was to have been in this boat, but George and Grame had seized the oars and pulled after Eleanor. The search for the girl was fruitless, but Don Endon, the young under engineer who had plunged in after Eleanor, was picked up.

The captain and the crew manned the other lifeboat; the two tiny craft were soon separated by the violence of the storm. The night had been very miserable, with the splashing of the cold spray, and the tireless tossing of the boat. No one slept. When morning came they saw the shore of Large Island near, and landed. They had food and water in the boat, and were quite comfortable after they had dried out before a smoking fire of wet wood.

Nicky had disappeared in the forenoon, and their chief occupation since had been in searching for him. There was no trace of his departure, so it was only a matter of conjecture where he had gone or what had happened to him.

While the Merediths told their story I was supplied with an extra pair of shoes that fitted me poorly, and was given some roast fish and half a can of beans. The shipwrecked party had quite a supply of food and water, for the captain had been very careful to see that the boat was loaded with as many stores as it could safely carry. Consequently the men had made no effort to find any native food, except to catch a few fish in various ways.

Dr. Grame had improvised a net from his shirt and a branch, and could bag as many small fish as he wished in a short time. As Dr. Meredith had said, most of the time had been spent in searching for Nicky.

As was to be expected, Mrs. Meredith was terribly broken up over the loss of her two children. She had cried until there were no more tears in her to shed, and was now living in a sort of coma. It was evident that her health was in a precarious state. Dr. Grame told me on the side that he would not be surprised at a nervous breakdown. The conversation dragged on for about half an hour, while I learned all the details of their experience.

The moon had risen and was lighting up the landscape brightly. Its long, streaked reflection on the quivering water was forlornly beautiful. I had learned all the news, and the talk had drifted into theories of the fate of the young Merediths, the chance of our being rescued soon, and how long the water supply would last. My mind returned repeatedly to the smoke I had seen on Crescent Island. I would certainly go there that very night, but should I take any one with me? And how could I get away from the rest of the party?

While thinking over these matters I strolled to the beach to have a look at the lifeboat. It was a light, strongly built dory. Fortunately the supplies had been transferred from it to a tarpaulin shelter on the shore. I would have to go in the boat. How else could I bring Eleanor back in case I should find her?

Then another thought entered my mind. Suppose I should be killed, or should lose the boat in some way or other? Was it fair to the little party huddled around the camp fire to expose them to the risk of being deprived of their boat? But then I had to take the boat if I wished to save Eleanor; and that settled the question for me.

Finding that there were no oars in sight, I peered into the boat. There were none there. This was very annoying. I would either have to find the oars or ask where they were. This would demand some sort of an explanation. Hence it was not unnatural that I should mutter an oath.

"And why curse, pray?" asked a voice near by.

Turning about sharply, I saw Dr. Grame standing beside me, his hand resting on the butt of a pistol in the holster at his side.

"Oh, you there," I said, trying to be nonchalant. "Didn't hear you come up. What do you think of this mess?"

"I think we all know things the other fellow doesn't. Wouldn't it be better to come out with them and all pull together?"

"What do you mean?" I demanded, feigning to miss his meaning. "What do I know that you do not?"

Grame regarded me narrowly for a moment, and then said:

"Well, in the first place, you know something about Eleanor—and for my part I know some rather interesting things about Nicky. We both have reasons, perhaps, for not telling the Merediths, especially at this time. But if we compared notes, many things might be cleared up. Come now, am I not right?"

"You are, undoubtedly," I answered, "and I shall do as you wish. But first, how did you know I had any knowledge of Eleanor?"

He smiled and took a step toward me.

"By that," he said, tapping the gun that hung at my side. "It's good I know you, or I would have suspected underhand work."

Eleanor's revolver! What a fool I had been! No wonder Grame suspected that I knew something about Eleanor.

"You recognized it?" I asked. "Do you suppose any of the others did?"

"No," he replied. "It's my own gun—that's why I recognized it. I gave it to Eleanor when we first struck the reef."

"Good," I muttered. "Now sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

I had no idea what a relief talking would be. However, when I came to my carelessness that night on Devil's Island, I broke down and cursed myself roundly. Grame clapped me on the back, almost driving it through my chest, and commanded me to pull myself together. He assured me that I was not to blame; that the catastrophe would have occurred if I had kept awake.

When I spoke of the smoke on Crescent Island, he cursed and said:

"We'll go there this very night. You and I will start immediately."

He made as if to rise, but I caught his belt and dragged him down again.

"Wait a minute," I commanded him. "There's just one thing more."

Then I told him about the dead monkey I had seen, and reminded him of the skeleton on Devil's Island. They were huge, powerful beasts, and probably vicious. Whether they would actually attack a person, I did not know.

When I had finished talking, Grame sat in silence. Then he spoke.

"I don't understand the presence of such creatures in the West Indies," he said. "This is something new to me. I don't see how they could have existed here without having been discovered before. The only explanation I can offer is that they have been carried here on a floating island, from Africa, which might have drifted north with some current. But at all events, they *are* here; so it is not our task at present to explain their presence, but to discover whether they are dangerous. Well, let's be on our way to Crescent Island."

I suggested that if we were going away we ought to warn Charley and the engineer. They could be on the lookout and protect the Merediths.

"You are right, Jimmy," he said. "I'll get them down here on the pretense of helping launch the boat. I'll tell the people that you and I are going to row down the shore and have a final look for Nicky before we turn in. Incidentally, I'll tell you some interesting facts about the young gentleman on the way."

Grame stalked back to the camp fire. I could hear him talking to the Merediths. In a few minutes he was back with Charley and Don at his heels. He invited them to sit down, and explained the danger of the apes to them.

"Now, men," he said, "Jimmy and I are going down the shore in the boat. Here is my gun and a belt of cartridges. Don't use it unless you have to; ammunition is scarce hereabouts. If we don't come back by morning, don't expect us back. We'll be where we can't come back. Don't let Mrs. Meredith hear about any of this. She is very nervous, and the shock might cause a collapse."

Turning to me, he said: "All right, Jimmy, let's go."

With the aid of the two men we launched the dory, and climbed in.

"You might bring us the oars from behind that palm tree to your left," called Dr. Grame to Charley.

The man found them in a trice, and we began our journey, each at an oar.

"How do we get to this island?" asked Dr. Grame.

"We go to the left of the little island we are headed for. Ours is the next one after it. You can spot it right away by its crescent shaped beach."

"Well, we're off," murmured the doctor. "The sooner we arrive, the better. Guess we had better take it easy now; we may need our strength on the return trip."

We rowed at a leisurely rate, our oars splashing softly, the only sound in the night. There was no wind, and the moon was climbing up the eastern sky. The surface of the ocean was rolling gently, and tossed the reflection of the moon in long, swinging arcs.

I had rowed at night before, but never with such emotions stirring in my heart. I was looking for the girl I loved, seeking to rescue her from the power of the unknown. My aid in this task was an eccentric and impetuous scientist. However, I was glad that it was Dr. Grame who was with me. I felt that he was a man to be relied on.

We rowed in silence for some time. At last Grame spoke.

"Jimmy," he said, "I am going to tell you what I think of this whole affair. It may strike you as absurd—as the fantasy of a mind steeped in science. Nevertheless, I'm sure I'm right—at last. Do you know who threw you overboard?"

"No," I answered, "do you?"

"I can guess," was his reply. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, Nicky gave you the crack on the head, and then helped you over the rail."

I was not surprised. In fact, I agreed with him, and told him so.

"But on what do you base your conclusion?" I asked.

"Well, it's this," answered Grame. "Everyone suspects that Nicky is a bit odd. He is odd—damn odd. Do you know anything about biology?"

I had to admit that I knew little.

"Well, I'll give you a lesson on this interesting subject before I go on with Nicky's case. You have probably heard that man is descended from the ape. That is not quite true. He is the brother of the ape; they both had the same forefathers, so to speak. But the origin of man lies even farther back than the parent of the monkey.

"Monkeys, dogs, horses, ourselves and countless other animals originated from a creature that in turn is descended from the amphibian. The latter developed from an even lower form of life, which came itself from one-celled animals—so small that they are visible only under the microscope. This sounds imaginative, fantastic. Nevertheless it is accepted by scientists, and many laymen. Eventually it will be admitted by everyone.

"This is a fact that has been believed since the time of Darwin—since before him, in fact. However, we now have to take up a newer idea. Many biologists hold that the individual, in its development, retraces the development of the human race. Every creature begins life in the form of a one-celled organism, so small as to be invisible except to the microscope.

"That is the way the human race began life. As the egg develops, the embryo has gill slits—just as the human race went through the fish period, and breathed through gills. Man still has a small vermiform appendix, an organ that is found in the body of the rabbit, whose function is the digestion of grass. In the rabbit, it is large. It was also large in man while mankind was going through the grass eating stage; but since man has given up this food, the appendix has shrunk in size, and remains only as a vestige of the past. In time it will probably entirely disappear.

"I will not go into details. These are a few illustrations to enable you to understand what I say. So you see that each individual, in his development, recapitulates the development of the human race. In the world of science this is called the Biogenetic Law, or the Law of Recapitulation.

"This recapitulation is physical, as stated in the law. However, it is my opinion that one's soul, one's intellect—one's physiologi-

cal and psychological makeup—go through the same process of recapitulation. Now I believe that Nicky, in his development, has carried into life a strain of the primeval; a tinge of the beast. He is wavering between two possibilities—it is a matter of chance whether he will become perfectly normal in a very short time, or whether he will become a beast in his nature. At present he is a combination. At one time he is a perfect little angel; as nice a child as you could want. At other times he is a devil, and behaves as if he were a wild animal. Even his physical appearance changes.

"During the time you have known him, he has been quite normal. But the morning after your disappearance I noticed a change in him. I strongly suspected that he had been a wild animal that night, and had reverted back to himself with the day.

"I have never seen him when he was having one of these spells—I have only seen him on the edge of them, or just after he has recovered. They leave their mark. I don't know whether he is intelligent when he becomes a beast, or whether he is as other beasts are. I know that his body does not change, except in minor ways.

"His family think they have seen him in these periods, but they haven't. They, as I, have only seen him on the boundary line. He is in a much worse condition than they imagine. I haven't told them, because it would only have caused them unnecessary worry if he should turn out all right. If he doesn't—well, there is nothing that can be done for him, so why upset the poor people any more than they are already?"

I agreed with Dr. Grame on this point. However, his recital seemed very strange. Yet I could not help believing him. The way he put it was so plausible. I asked many questions, but was convinced from the first.

During the course of Dr. Grame's talk we had drawn very near the white sand beach of Crescent Island. We ceased talking, and rowed silently. Then I could feel the bottom of the boat grating on the sand.

"Better give me your knife," whispered Grame as we dragged the boat up on the beach, and made it fast to a large log half submerged in the sand.

I offered him the gun, but he refused, saying that he could get along with a knife.

"Where was the smoke?" he asked.

"I think I know the general direction," I answered, and we set out along the shore, hugging the edge of the woods, and walking quietly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCREAM IN THE DARK.

THE tide was almost at the flood, and we were forced to plod along in the loose sand that is never packed down by the water. This made walking difficult, and materially retarded our progress.

We advanced for some time in silence. Then Grame spoke.

"What are the chances of our locating the source of that smoke?"

"I found your fire without much trouble," I answered, "but luck was with me."

Grame grunted.

"Do you see the palm trees ahead of us?" I asked, "I'll climb one of those, and have a look around."

The trees were about a quarter of a mile away, on a small promontory. If a fire were burning anywhere on the island, it should have been visible from one of the palms.

Our advance was suddenly checked by a loud splash.

"What was that?" I demanded.

"Look out there!" he replied, pointing his finger.

For a moment I saw nothing but water and sky. Then a dark form broke up through the water, hovered in the air, and fell back with a resounding splash.

"What in Heaven's name!" gasped Grame.

"Looked like a whiplay," I answered. "They have that little trick."

"Oh, I know the whiplay. Has wings—swims as a bird flies. Long tail with a bunch of barbed arrows that it can sling into you."

"That's it," I answered.

By the time we had finished discussing the peculiarities of the whiplay, we had

arrived at the palm grove. I chose the tallest and undertook the ascent. Climbing a palm is no easy task. The trunk is smooth and slippery, and all its branches are in a cluster at the very top of the tree.

Several trials were necessary before I finally managed to reach the fans. I drew myself up into a sitting position, and looked about. But my efforts were wasted. Far and near, there was no trace of a fire, or anything that would denote the presence of humans or monkeys. I remained aloft for several minutes, straining my eyes, but to no avail. However, I did get an idea of the geography of the island. Its shore line formed a triangle, whose base was the crescent shaped beach. Thus we were on one of the vertices.

I descended and informed Grame of the failure of my observations.

"Well, you can't expect success in the first attempt," was his philosophic comment.

After some consideration, we decided to continue on down the shore line, and strike inland later on. It was going to be a difficult matter to find the fire, or the place where the fire had been. Here we were, on an island several square miles large, trying to find a spot the size of a door mat. If we did run across it, it would be by the merest luck. But chance had been friendly to me from the very first of the voyage, so I did not despair.

The stars above us were very bright, and the sky was illumined by the full moon. As I watched the twinkling spots, I wondered if on their surface any searches such as ours were taking place. Was any man on that very bright one looking for the girl he loved? We were small and insignificant, after all. Why should providence bother with such mites as Dr. Grame and myself?

Grame interrupted my star-gazing by a low exclamation.

"Footprints!"

"Where?" I asked.

"Not in the sky, at any rate," he answered with a little laugh. "Right ahead of you. See 'em?"

Grame was not mistaken. High up on the beach, out of the reach of the waves, were a group of indistinct prints. Half

obliterated by the wind and spray, they were still recognizable. A couple of the more perfect ones seemed to have been made by a big flat foot with extremely long toes. The others were merely depressions, partly filled by the blowing sand.

"This bunch must have landed here," at length remarked my companion.

"Do you see any mark of a boat in the sand?" I asked.

"No. They probably landed at low tide. The prints seem to lead up from the water."

I suggested that we look around a bit for the boat or raft; I thought that it might have been carried into the sedge grass bordering the shore. We searched for several minutes, but found nothing.

"What kind of prints are they?" I asked.

"Impossible to say exactly," he answered, "however, it looks to me as if they had been made by some of your monkey friends. What do you think?"

I did not answer him; I was wondering whether it could have been the apes who had abducted Eleanor. It was not a pleasant thought.

"Have you seen any marks that could have been made by a shoe?" I asked.

"I thought of that, too, son," Grame answered. "I've looked carefully, but all of the prints seem to be of the same kind. I can't say yet whether Eleanor was in this band or not."

"How many do you think landed here?" I demanded.

"Hard to tell. I should say about seven or eight, but I may be way off. It's perfectly possible that any number more might have remained nearer the water; in that case their prints would have been washed away by the waves."

The marks in the sand led down the beach. After we had taken another good look about, we set out to follow them. Here at last was a clew, and trailing it was more liable to bring results than beating the island blindly.

"You had better keep your gun at hand; no telling when something might turn up," Grame warned me.

We watched the prints closely, hoping to find one made by a shoe. We saw several that Eleanor might have made, but these

were so filled with loose sand that it was really impossible to make sure. There was always the possibility that Eleanor had walked further down on the firm sand, in which case the marks made by her shoes had been eradicated by the water.

At length we came to a place where the markings disappeared. After a close examination, it seemed quite evident that the party had turned inland. We were able to track them for a while by the trampled grass and torn creepers, but at length these tell-tale signs were left behind.

"All we can do now is to trust to luck, and cruise around at hazard," said Grame. "You might try crawling up a tree again."

This time I found a live oak, taller and easier to climb than a palm. The view from the topmost branches was beautiful, but disappointing. I could see no traces of living beings. Below me was a dense mass of trees, vines, and bushes, shining in the pale light of the moon. Beyond the dark shadow of the land, the ocean lay bright and calm. The only sounds were the rustling of the leaves in a light breeze, the creaking of branches, and an occasional croak from a bird awakened.

I slid down and joined Grame.

"What luck?" he asked.

"None at all."

We started out again, walking in long zigzags, as a ship tacks against the wind. In this way we were able to cover a great deal of ground.

After half an hour spent in beating the woods in this manner, we stopped to rest a moment. It was hot work forcing a way through the tangle of foliage; the briers tore our clothing; and the smaller creepers had an annoying way of twining about our legs and tripping us.

"My word," grunted Grame, "this is a regular jungle. We'll be at this all night before—"

His words were cut short by a scream—loud, hoarse, awful, enough to strike fear into the heart of any man. Grame seized my arm; we listened breathlessly. The scream was not repeated, but it seemed to vibrate through the whole island. Several dismal croaks came back from the roosting birds.

"Death in the grave!" gasped my companion. "What a noise, what a noise!"

I shivered.

"What do you suppose *that* was?" asked the doctor when he had recovered his composure.

"Couldn't say," I replied. "It sounded like almost anything horrible."

"Hope it doesn't come our way, that's all."

Then I thought of Eleanor. She might have been within two feet of the thing that had filled Grame and me with horror and dread.

"Come on," I said, "we've got to go in the direction of that sound."

"Right. I wonder whether monkeys can scream like that?"

The cry had come from our right. We made our way in that direction, moving cautiously.

"It couldn't have been very far away," said Grame. "Keep your eyes open."

I went first with the gun, and Grame followed with the knife. The shadows ahead were dense; we could see nothing in them. My ankle turned, and I sank on my knees with a muttered curse. Looking to see what I had stepped on, a familiar object lay before my eyes; an object that filled me with excitement and hope.

"Look at this," I whispered.

"A shoe," gasped Grame. "A woman's shoe!"

"Eleanor's," I said. "I remember it."

"Then she came this way. It's probable she isn't far from us now. Go on."

We started off.

"Better crawl," grunted my companion. "Believe I heard something ahead."

He was right. I rather felt than heard it. It was one of those vibrant, pulsing noises.

"No crawling for mine," I whispered in his ear. "I prefer to keep on my feet. I'd advise you to do the same."

The sound continued. After we had advanced a short distance it was apparent that a clearing was in front of us. Streaks of moonlight were visible, and the woods were lighter. A moment later my guess was confirmed. We stood on the edge of a small clearing. In it lay numerous ob-

jects, lit up by the moon. Grame drew up beside me, and we stood gazing, not daring to breathe.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISSING BOAT.

HOW long I would have stood thus I do not know. Grame had more presence of mind, and drew me behind a large live oak. We looked at each other in silence.

"Did you see her?" asked Grame.

"No," I replied, did you?"

"No."

"Well, we've got to find out whether she is there, and which one she is," I whispered, almost to myself.

The noise I spoke of before still persisted. I gradually realized what it was—the sobbing of a woman. I whispered my conviction to Grame, and he agreed.

"She is evidently there, and awake. We must attract her attention, without awakening the rest. We've got to sneak her away if possible; they're too many for gun play. How many cartridges have you?"

"About twenty," I answered.

"Well, you'd get about ten apes, and then they would get us all. Save your gun for use if they wake up. How can we attract Eleanor's attention without arousing the suspicions of the rest?"

I thought quickly.

"We might try whistling a tune. If the apes did hear it the chances are they would think it was a bird."

"All right, try it," whispered Grame.

I began to whistle "Good Night, Ladies." Why I picked this particular tune is more than I can say. It was a weird scene. There we were in the very lair of a band of savage apes, and one of us was whistling "Good Night, Ladies!" It is far from a cheerful melody at best; under these circumstances it was positively eerie. I shall never hear the tune again without a shudder.

But its smooth air had effect. The sobbing ceased. My glance roved from one prostrate form to another in an effort to locate Eleanor as soon as possible. She had

evidently heard the tune, but did not realize the full significance of it. It would dawn on her, I thought.

And then one of the bodies rose slowly and began to look around. I stepped out into the moonlight and continued to whistle softly. Another body moved slightly and grunted. I quit whistling. The body that had raised itself peered at me intently for a moment, and then waved. It was Eleanor.

My joy was so great that I thought the pounding of my heart would surely awaken the apes. I prayed that Eleanor would not make any noise. Slowly, ever so slowly, she crept toward us through the sleeping forms. I followed her course with the muzzle of my revolver, ready to send a bullet through the first ape that hindered her advance. It seemed centuries before she reached us.

"Thank God!" were her first words.

"Here's your shoe," was my abrupt reply, as I gave her the frail pump I had unconsciously held in my hand.

"Come!" whispered Grame. "There's no time to lose."

Eleanor detained him with a gesture.

"Nicky's there!" she whispered. "He has gone mad. I can't leave him."

"I'll go wake him," I volunteered.

"No! No!" said Eleanor hastily. "He would give us away. He has attached himself to those things. If he wakes he will surely cry out."

"We'll both go," said Grame, drawing out a handkerchief. "We'll gag him with

this. If he tries to gurgle I'll cut off his wind. We will carry him with us."

I must admit that the thought of exposing Eleanor to danger again almost made me object to this plan, yet I knew she would never forgive me if I did. So I asked:

"Which one is he?"

Eleanor pointed out her brother to us and we began to crawl toward the sleeping band. As we left, Grame whispered to the girl.

"If there's any trouble stay behind the tree."

It was delicate work. We passed the first sleeper without mishap, Grame in the lead. As we approached the second ape, he groaned and flapped his arms. We crouched down, hardly breathing. However, he gave no more signs of awakening, and we continued our advance. Two were passed in safety; nevertheless I could not help thinking of our return trip with Nicky. Would we be able to keep him quiet? It was a big chance. Then we reached him.

He was lying on his left side with his face away from us, apparently asleep. I crawled up beside Grame, who motioned to me that I was to seize Nicky when he gave the word. He seemed to hesitate before applying the gag. Who wouldn't have hesitated? How large a chance did we have of extracting a sleeping boy from the midst of thirty or more sleeping apes, especially when the boy did not wish to be carried away? The wind sighed through the leaves of the forest, and some crawling thing rustled over the dried twigs near by.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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SPRING

'TIS Spring!

Earth is awakening.
And he who is not blind, will see
The signs of immortality;
He who is not deaf, will hear
And know the truth, that God is near;
And he who is not dumb, will sing,
Now it is Spring!

Ida M. Thomas.



The Sea's Judgment

By **FRANK H. SHAW**

THE last of the stevedores had long ago gone ashore; the second engineer had followed their example, after a pressing invitation to Sellerman to accompany him to supper at a favorite rendezvous; the night watchman had reported all things in order; but Sellerman still remained in his cabin, curiously expectant.

The call would come in a very little while; of that he was perfectly convinced. When he heard the boots of the watchman clatter on the deck overhead his heart gave a bit of a leap in his breast—he pricked his ears. No; not this time—but presently, of course—presently. He looked about the austere cabin that had housed him these many years, and thought that in a little while another man would benefit by all the many gadgets he himself had installed in order to make the sea bedroom more home-like and agreeable.

He picked up his shabby badge cap from the settee and eyed it whimsically. The peak was bent and cracked—and, anyway, it wasn't the right pattern for a skipper's

cap. The peak needed to be bigger, to hold the gold lace that denoted supreme dignity; Sellerman set the headgear on his thinning hairs and studied himself in the mirror above the collapsible washstand. Yes, he admitted to himself, laughing at his own childish conceit, a gold-peaked cap would suit him all right.

"It won't be long now," he said, reaching for his pipe. "And Molly 'll be more than glad, won't you, old girl?"

He cast a glance at the faded photograph on the enameled bulkhead—a photograph in a handsome silver frame. That frame was an extravagance of newly married days, and even so, not at all worthy to frame the representation of the most wonderful woman in all the world.

The fragrant smoke wreaths clouded his face and hid the quiet smile that curled his lips. He'd worked hard and faithfully for this day, he admitted. He had more than once refused tempting offers to leave the old Molyneux, but the ultimate reward was worth all the sacrifices made—yes—well

worth it all. But now the apprenticeship was over and done with and—he admitted to a thrill of excitement. Skipper of the old Molyneux at last, eh? Ambition realized after many years!

He patted the settee on which he had seated himself with an affectionate hand. Good old steady-going packet she was, too—nothing flashy or record-breaking about her, but she was honest and trustworthy through and through, as who should know better than himself, who had worked up from third mate to chief during the past fifteen years? A ship that you could trust—fit to go anywhere, do anything.

"Lord bless us!" he ejaculated. "I'm as fond of the old hulk as if she was a woman, I believe."

Well, the marine superintendent was aboard, close closeted with the skipper in his cabin under the bridge, and in a little while the announcement would be made.

"That young chap who came aboard with Captain Lockyer 'll be the new second mate, I expect," Sellerman decided. "Munro 'll take my job, and—I hope the telegraph office won't be closed before I get ashore—Molly 'll be glad to get the news."

He reached to the table and picked up a letter lying there—already sealed and addressed. In the many sheets he had said much. He had described the homeward voyage in detail, because patient Molly always liked to be informed of every detail of his day's routine; and he had also allowed his hopes to write themselves down in plain black and white.

Captain Brenstone had definitely announced his intention of retiring at the end of the voyage—he'd swallowed the anchor. And so, as senior chief officer of the line, Sellerman would naturally step into the vacant position—as ordained by the custom of the sea. That meant more pay, longer holidays, too—extra chances of making Molly happy; and God knew she deserved it all—yes, and more. Molly was a woman in a million—they'd been married for sixteen years and they were still sweethearts.

"Life's not been very easy for her, one way and another," Sellerman thought, still weighing the bulky envelope. "She's had a thin time—making both ends meet on my

pay hasn't been all jam for her. I—I wish I'd told her to come up here and wait for our arrival, though—it 'd be nice to see her face when she hears the news."

He lifted his head as the watchman's feet clattered down the ladder.

"Captain would like to see you, sir, if you've not gone ashore."

"Yes; all right, Brickley."

He discovered that his heart was beating a little faster than the normal; faster, indeed, than it had ever beaten in times of emergency and stress. But he was aware, too, of elation. The concrete reward for years of ungrudging service was now in sight; and the anticipatory taste of it was good on the palate. He climbed the ladder and knocked on the door of the bridge cabin—probably for the last time, he thought.

"Come in!"

The air within was thick with the smoke of cigars; half-emptied tumblers were on the table. It was a spacious apartment enough; handsomely appointed, for though the accommodation allotted to juniors aboard the Molyneux might leave a little to be desired, there was nothing wrong with the skipper's quarters.

"Oh, good evening, Sellerman."

It was the marine superintendent who opened the ball, as was only right. "I thought you might have gone ashore—we're a bit late."

"Good evening, sir. No; I stopped aboard—had a few things to see to."

He would show nothing of eagerness, he decided; he would accept the good luck calmly, as he had accepted most things that life had brought him, whether good or evil.

"Good, man. By the way, Cap'n Brenstone"—the superintendent jerked his bearded chin toward the whisky bottle—"don't you think—"

"Why, yes, sir; certainly."

Brenstone reached down a clean tumbler from the rack and measured out a generous supply; and half consciously Sellerman noticed that Brenstone was getting really old—really old. His hand was not quite steady; the neck of the bottle chattered a little on the tumbler's rim.

"Help yourself to the water," said Brenstone gruffly, pushing tumbler and carafe

forward. Sellerman obeyed, raised the glass to his lips.

"Good luck, sir," he said.

"You can drink to your new skipper, Sellerman," said the superintendent. "Captain Lyons, Mr. Sellerman."

"Your very good health, sir," the mate said in a quite steady voice, and drank.

The youngest man in the cabin nodded and laughed affably. He was a good looking man, with a set of perfect teeth; a bit of a dandy; and there was something lacking in his face, somehow. Among a community of ordinary men he would have passed muster easily—he would probably have shown to advantage, indeed; but by contrast with these hard-bitten companions he showed badly. Maybe it was the weakness of his chin that told against him, or perhaps it was something in his eyes.

"I've been hearing nothing but good of you, Mr. Sellerman," Captain Lyons said, and reached out a ringed hand. "I fancy we'll get on well enough together, eh?"

"I hope so, sir—I'm sure I hope so," replied the mate, and sat down—rather heavily.

His glance met the glance of Captain Brenstone, and very gently, as if to answer the slight bewilderment that appeared in Sellerman's eyes, Brenstone shook his head and lifted his shoulders. That was all. There was nothing in the atmosphere to indicate that the hopes of many years had been dashed to unconsidered fragments.

Lyons took out his watch and consulted it. It was a handsome watch of gold. The hand that held it was smooth and almost effeminate.

"I'll take over the inventory to-morrow, then, if you're agreeable, captain," he said, "I've got an appointment uptown at eight, so I'd better be moving now. Any one for the beach?"

He got to his feet and held out a hand to Brenstone. He turned to the mate:

"You and I'll talk things over in the morning," he said with a suggestion of a rasp of authority in his voice. He donned a smart overcoat, selected a fresh cigar from the box on the table, lit it, cocked his hat at an angle with the aid of the mirror, and stepped out on deck. The door closed be-

hind him as the marine superintendent's hand came down on Sellerman's shoulder.

"A damned shame, I call it," said the grizzled man with a rough note of sympathy in his voice. "Not that there's anything wrong with Lyons—never heard a word against him; but—"

"Mate of the Prometheus, wasn't he?" asked Sellerman quietly.

Sailormen in the same line might go for a score of years without ever meeting face to face. But the gossip runs along the water fronts, and the men of the sea know all the histories of those who share the common burden. Sellerman was perfectly well aware that Lyons was a newcomer to the line—a man who had gone ahead rapidly. He was at least six years junior to Sellerman. The marine superintendent spat out the end of a new cigar somewhat emphatically.

"He's an owner's pet," he declared. "Young Mr. Brent's taken a fancy to him." He shrugged his shoulders and a note almost of appeal was in his voice.

"Don't blame me, Sellerman, as I shan't blame you if you chuck your hand in. But what could I do? I told Mr. Brent that you were senior mate and that the job was yours by rights, but he's superior to all customs. I lost my temper with him, I tell you; things got a bit hot between us, but—well, I had my own job to consider, don't you see?"

"Yes, sir, I see," said Sellerman. "But—I'd rather hoped—thought—"

"It's unfair!" blurted Brenstone. "A damned rotten shame! If I'd known they'd do a thing like this I'd—I'd have jolly well seen them hanged before I sent in my resignation. Tell 'em to look out for another mate, Sellerman—I would, in your place. You and I've seen a few bits of hard weather together, and I know what you can do. Come to me for a reference—it won't be one that you need be ashamed of."

"Jobs aren't as easily come by as all that, sir," said Sellerman quietly.

He had listened to the talk along the water fronts; he knew that the inevitable slump in shipping had come and that years might pass before things mended.

"It isn't as if Molly—my wife and I'd got anything saved. We—we couldn't af-

ford to be on the beach for long. That is, sir"—he turned to the marine superintendent—"unless you know of something."

"No, I know of nothing—nothing. Bul-lens have laid up six ships during the last month—other firms are doing the same; cutting their losses, eh? No, there aren't any jobs worth while, and if there were there'd be a dozen men for each one. I'm sorry, Sellerman—damn sorry. I know the work you've put in aboard this packet."

"You don't know the half of it," said Brenstone with the energy of the newly emancipated.

No longer need he stand in awe of the superintendent. He had always been a thrifty man, and one or two investments had turned out well. "You'd have had to whistle for your Molyneux once or twice if it hadn't been for Sellerman, I can tell you. There was that time off Cape Desolation—you remember?"

Ungrudgingly—he could afford to be generous now—he cited half a dozen instances where Sellerman, his coolness, his resourcefulness, his indomitable pluck, had saved the ship from disaster. The superintendent nodded agreement.

"But that doesn't count for anything against an owner's whim," he said. "Mr. Brent's taken a fancy to Lyons—Mr. Brent made a trip in the *Prometheus*, you know, and he and Lyons went ashore a good bit together. A rotten shame! But what can you do?"

"Go ashore and get some supper," said Brenstone. "Come along, Sellerman, you'll be my guest to-night. We'll have a drop of something to take the taste of it all out of our mouths. It isn't as if you'd ever done anything to dirty your ticket, either. If I'd only known—"

Sellerman went down to his own cabin, walking heavily. He stared about his cabin with tired eyes, almost as if he were lost. The dream of years had been suddenly shattered. Only now did he realize how he had built up fancies; a very fabric of golden hopes. He had pictured Molly established in a cottage of better proportions than the place that housed her. Their boy would have a chance to go to a decent school and start fairly in the battle of life. Molly

would be able to get a new gown occasionally without denying herself some almost necessity for the purpose—and—and—

He coughed thickly and blew his nose with emphasis. Resentment surged up in his soul. It wasn't fair; it wasn't fair. He'd done the work, and here a dandified parvenu had come in and snaffled the cream of his labors. No, it wasn't fair—but then, whoever heard of fairness at sea?

"I've a good mind to chuck my hand in," he muttered, getting into his overcoat. As he was turning out the lamp—the Molyneux carried no electric light—he saw the bulky letter addressed to his wife, and with a hint of passion in his manner, took it up. He was about to tear it across as useless, when his glance rested on the framed photograph. He slid the letter into his pocket untorn.

"No harm in letting her be happy a day or two longer," he said.

He awakened next morning with a fixed determination to cut loose and seek for another job where fair treatment might be expected. Brenstone's admonitory words were still in his ears; the retiring skipper had preached heretical doctrines. But after he had drunk the acrid tea the watchman brought him, after he had donned the shabby brass-buttoned jacket and the shabbier cap with the broken peak, he went out on deck, into the rawness of a November morning. He climbed to the upper bridge and through the slanting rain and the opaqueness of the river fog he looked the old ship over, a lump growing in his throat.

He clutched the rail as if it were the hand of an old friend; and he knew in that moment, because of the smarting of his eyes and a vague suggestion of emptiness about his middle part, that he would accept conditions as they were, because even if he searched all the ports of the world he could never find a ship that would mean so much to him as did the Molyneux. Habits cemented during many years are not easily broken; and Sellerman did not like sudden changes. He slapped the rail with a vigorous hand.

"We'll stick together a bit longer, old girl," he said huskily.

He set about his old routine. Later he wrote another letter to his wife, explaining

matters clearly; sympathizing with her on account of her banished hopes. He made a mental determination to deprive himself of the few simple pleasures he indulged in ashore. By dint of saving the meagre amount he customarily spent on his own enjoyment, he might be able to provide a little treat for Molly when he got his leave and was permitted to visit his own home. He tried not to feel dislike for the dapper man who had stepped into the shoes that were rightly his when Lyons appeared aboard, somewhat full of an account of a dinner ashore with the junior partner of the line.

"My sister was with us," Lyons explained. "Brent's more than a bit struck on her. *Some* dinner, I tell you."

So that accounted for the milk in the coconut! Ship owners were human beings, and a smile of approval from a pretty girl—if Miss Lyons took after her brother she would naturally be a good-looker—meant more than years of faithful service!

"We'll get this old hulk smartened up a bit," Captain Lyons stated, after he had taken over from Brenstone. "You'd better let me look over your indents, Sellerman; there won't be too many questions asked, I can assure you. I treacled up the Prometheus until she looked like a yacht."

He had a good deal to say about his own smartness, and about his intimacy with the junior partner. He appeared in a new jacket, with four rings of gold lace on his sleeves and a glittering peak to his cap, which cap he wore rakishly. It was not until Sellerman returned from his week's leave, however—Sellerman thought a lot about Molly's tired eyes and work-hardened hands when he returned to the Molyneux—that Lyons began to criticize.

The ship was lacking in smartness, he averred—things would have to be altered. She was simply a floating pigsty—quite different from the Prometheus. He had already quarreled with the chief engineer; he had engaged a new steward; and his cabin was being redecorated.

"You ought to buy yourself a new uniform, too," he told Sellerman. "You've to think of the credit of the firm, you know—and the owners don't like to see their people going about in rags."

Sellerman looked at the tarnished lace of his cuffs, reflected that the cost of a new uniform would eat a monstrous hole into a month's pay, and said nothing. Lyons later told Mr. Brent that he quite failed to understand why folks cracked up Sellerman so much—he was a sullen old swabtail, entirely lacking in smartness—an old-timer.

"He'd better not come playing the old sailor trick with me, though," he said, a trifle boastfully. "I'm the man to keep him in his place."

But Sellerman did not require keeping in his place. He accepted the inevitable without outward complaint; and when the chief engineer—his firm friend—waxed indignant against the injustice of the business, he directed that angry mechanic's wrath into other channels.

"After all, he's skipper," he said mildly. "And I suppose the owners can do as they like, since they pay the bill."

When clearing from dock on the outward passage, Captain Lyons knew nothing of the expert assistance given unostentatiously to him by his chief mate. Things went better than he expected—a first command is a trying experience, when you have no senior behind you to shoulder possible blame—and he took credit to himself for coolness and resource.

The Molyneux met with excellent weather; all things worked smoothly. Sellerman had reengaged the previous crew, who knew their work; and he regretted the absence of the late steward, who, even if rough and ready, at least knew his work and could cook an eatable meal, which was more than the swagger cabin servant, engaged by Lyons because of his ability to look after clothes, could do.

Lyons, being a smart navigator, had no difficulty in taking his command to her first port. No emergencies were encountered; and yet, as time went by, Sellerman began to feel vaguely uneasy. Precisely why he could not say. To be sure, Lyons paid great attention to trifling matters and ignored the greater issues; but he was a young man, conceited, very conscious of his position.

Only once or twice he had showed signs of vacillation: he had issued contradictory orders; he had shown a lack of nerve. His

temper was not always under the iron control required by a successful shipmaster; he developed a habit of nagging that got people's backs up. Once abroad he took only the slightest interest in the ship, and spent all his time ashore, except when he brought smart friends aboard to breakfast in the saloon. He was extremely keen on the social side of life. He believed in a force he called influence, and every acquaintance he made was weighed up with the idea of the amount of influence he could exert in the right quarter for the ultimate benefit of Hilary Lyons.

He reprimanded Sellerman on more occasions than one for the untidiness of the ship, losing sight of the fact that a cargo vessel must needs be untidy when discharging or loading her freight.

Sellerman noticed that little by little a lofty suggestion of tolerant patronage sounded in his senior's voice. But he was always too busy to pay much attention to such details—he was a man who lived for his ship and the stowage of the Molyneux's new freight demanded his attention. He belonged to that old school which believes it is a first mate's duty to act as ship's husband, notwithstanding the attitude of chief stevedores and such imposing personages. As a result, complaints were lodged with Lyons concerning his mate's interference with stowage plans.

Now Captain Brenstone had implicitly trusted Sellerman; he had invariably sided with him against the shore crowd, whose main object in life was to make money as quickly as possible. Lyons did nothing of the sort; he used these complaints as a hook on which to hang his displeasure.

"You've got to remember, Mr. Mate," he said impressively, "that I'm captain, and on my good word depends your future. You're too old-fashioned in your ways, and the sooner you wake up to the fact that times are changing the better it will be for you."

He further hinted that his position with Mr. Brent was a strong position; and threw out a suggestion that it was in his power to cast unsatisfactory mates on to the beach, where they could succeed or starve so far as he was concerned.

"If we meet any sort of weather up north with the cargo stowed as Michikoff suggests it should be stowed," said Sellerman doggedly, "we'll be in a hole. I know the ship from stem to stern; Michikoff doesn't. He's not making the voyage in her, and he doesn't care a damn so long as he shoves the cargo aboard and gets his check."

"He's the company's stevedore, and he's stowed more ships than you've ever imagined in your life; there's nothing you can teach him," snapped Lyons. But Sellerman had his way—he got it in the fashion known to deep-water mates the world over. Superiors might issue orders, but subordinates carry them out according to their own interpretation; and Sellerman had a bottle of liquor handy in his cabin whenever the foreman stevedores looked thirsty. There was nothing the matter with the Molyneux's stowage when she left port and turned her bow toward the north.

It was just as well, perhaps; for the weather conditions were altering. The ship encountered a pampero before she had been at sea thirty-six hours that tested her thoroughly. She worried through that storm with the loss of only minor deck fittings, and picked up her stride through the radiant tropics. But the gale had shaken Lyons a little; and to cover his shakiness he assumed a more blustering manner. He boasted loudly of the things that he had done and the greater things that he would do. He was still boasting when the Molyneux ran into the tail end of a North Atlantic snorter. Sellerman will never forget that breeze so long as life endures.

It was five o'clock in the morning, and the Molyneux was nosing into a sea that ran like rabid mountains. There was sleet in the driving gale; it rattled like grapeshot against the weather cloths of the bridge, it hammered savagely at Sellerman's straining eyes where he stood in the bridge's weather wing. The winter-bound Atlantic was showing puny man what it could do in the way of spiteful bitterness.

It was dark, but occasionally the phosphorescent crest of a more than ordinarily gigantic comber loomed weirdly from the gloom, hung menacingly over the shuddering, struggling fabric, and swooped down,

with the weight of all doom, to deluge the Molyneux with devastating water. She was stripped for the ordeal, as only Sellerman, greatly experienced, could have stripped her. He, sensing the coming weather, had taken every precaution, what time Lyons was talking about paint work and varnish. Extra tarpaulins covered the vulnerable hatches; derricks had been unshipped and firmly lashed where they would do most good. Sellerman patted the ice-cold rail of the bridge as the ship swooped chatteringly to the crest of a monstrous wave and then plunged, with sick twistings, into the following trough.

"You're all right, old girl," he said. "We've been through worse than this together."

He was very fond of the ship; he was proud of her, too. She was behaving as well as a vessel could under the circumstances, and he reflected pridefully that his close attention to her stowage had made her weatherly. She was as wet as a half tide rock; whole water swirled about her gaunt decks; but she was safe; she swung up buoyantly from the resounding hollows, she felt resilient.

"She's burying herself like a pig," said a querulous voice behind him; and a waft of spirit-scented breath passed the mate's nostrils, to be torn away by the bellowing gale.

"I thought she was doing very nicely, sir," Sellerman replied.

"Shows what a lot you know about it! I've never seen such a hog. The Prometheus would have laughed at this."

"The old packet isn't exactly in tears over it," snapped the mate. "And it's going to be a lot worse before it's better, sir."

"You know all about it, don't you? Slow her down, man, slow her down! What in all hell do you mean by driving her into this sea? Haven't you got more sense than that?"

"She's eased down a good deal, sir; but she can stand all she's getting now."

"Do as you're told, damn you! How's a man going to get his sleep with the ship tying overhand knots in herself this fashion? My God!"

The Molyneux plunged wholeheartedly into a vast watery chasm that seemed to open right down to the Atlantic bed, and the race of her propeller, before the engineer on watch got to the throttle, jarred abominably. Sellerman applied himself to the engine-room speaking-tube and demanded a lessened speed. The ship was carrying little more than steerage way as it was; and in a minute or two, as the throb of her engines slackened, her bow swung off into the trough and she rolled comprehensively — so comprehensively, indeed, that Lyons failed to steady himself in time. His slippered feet slid on the wet planking and he collapsed into the lee wing of the bridge, with a dollop of ice-cold water over him. Spluttering, he hauled himself upright, and his voice shook with rage as he said:

"Next trip I'll see that I have a mate who knows something about handling a vessel in a seaway."

Then it was as though his rage overcame him, for he stumbled below to his cabin, and left Sellerman alone.

"Going to get me the sack, I suppose," thought the mate. "That'll be bad—unless things are improving at home, and that isn't likely. Steady, old lass. Your troubles are still ahead of you."

He communicated a fresh message to the engine-room, and presently the sick rolling ceased; the ship behaved more kindly. She continued to do so until the grim yellow dawn broke over the whirling wilderness of spite. Sellerman, staring out with puckered eyes, grunted.

"Going to be a snorter," he informed his pipe. "Yes, we'll have all the weather we want presently."

He stumped to the chartroom and studied the barometer. What he saw there made him whistle incredulously. The Molyneux was probably booked for the toughest struggle of all her checkered career. Sellerman went back to his position in the weather wing of the bridge, and looked the ship over fore and aft. He studied the minor damage of the night; his keen mind saw wherein the ship's greatest weaknesses lay. A ventilator had been smashed; a wash-port had been torn from its hinges; the ship pre-

sented a dishevelled appearance. Some drums of paint had broken loose from their moorings, capsized and smothered the fore deck plates with a viscous coating; the deck watch, moving aft, had difficulty in keeping their feet.

"Silly idiot—starting painting with this brewing up!" said Sellerman. "I warned him, but he's so cocksure—so cocksure. Well, he's skipper, and—Molly 'll be worried if I get the sack. I must do the best I can."

He summoned the boatswain and gave expert orders which caused that understanding seaman to nod approval. The sparse crew busied themselves, waist-deep in chilly water when they were not over their shoulders, in preparing the ship still further. Sellerman was leaving nothing to chance; and as he watched the men toiling like beavers, he saw the menace of the livid sky increase. He saw the first tumultuous squall that heralded the increase of the gale tear down toward the ship; he saw the high-leaping combers suddenly planed off flat, crushed down into muttering quiescence; he saw their crests snatched away and thrown in milky veins across the waste.

He moved to the telegraph and rang for extra speed, and the Molyneux quivered eagerly as she slogged forward to engage the enemy. With a droning roar behind a yelling scream, the squall broke. It thrust at the fabric, it pushed her bodily back, driving her under—under. Sellerman took the wheel from the gasping helmsman's hands.

"Go down and tell the captain the weather's getting worse," he bellowed, his lips close to the man's ear.

As the sailor tacked away he handled the wheel spokes cunningly, and beneath his ragged mustache his teeth set grimly. He knew the ship; her weaknesses, her strength, for he loved her as a man sometimes does love an insensate thing. The Molyneux appeared anything but insensate now; nay, she had a definite intelligence; she was playing a game of her own with the elements; cowering back, gathering her strength, lying inert, playing possum, until the savage relentlessness of the first onslaught showed signs of lessening; then she

thrust forward, diving, leaping, wallowing—but holding her own. Sellerman humored her—gentled her as a man does an overtried horse. The helmsman returned, to bawl:

"Cap'n's asleep, sir—wouldn't wake though I shook him ever so."

There was a bit of grin on his face. He had not been blind to the empty bottle washing about the cabin floor; and his experience of drink aided him in diagnosing the cause of Lyons's sodden slumbers.

"Skipper's oiled," he ventured; and Sellerman snarled at him suddenly, like a tiger about to spring.

"Keep your damned mouth shut or I'll—"

Whatever else happened the sanctity of the captain must be preserved—that was the law of the sea. Let the skipper do as his paramount will suggested, he could do no wrong in the eyes of his crew. The mate remembered the whiff of alcohol that had crossed his nostrils some while before, however. There was not much assistance to be looked for from Captain Lyons, unless he rose to the emergency. But the mate was a judge of character—the sea had taught him that branch of his trade—and he had estimated the captain aright. Lyons, bluff and overbearing in smooth water, boastful and meticulously smart ashore, possessed a yellow streak in his ego that let him down in the moment of trial.

"Serve him right if I chucked my hand in," Sellerman thought.

A sense of the bitter injustice of it all assailed him; waves of disgust ran across his brain as the waves of the sea were now washing over the laboring ship. This gilt-edged figurehead was officially in command, his would be the credit if the ship survived without damage; and he—he was lying hoggishly drunk in his cubby-hole, a cold funk—a rat hiding from danger.

"God, wouldn't it sicken you!" said the mate to himself.

Aloud he shouted: "You stand by for a bit, my son—till this squall's over."

And it was not until eight bells that the squall subsided, by which time the untried third mate was on the bridge for the relief. Mr. Wilmot gulped a bit as he surveyed

the outlook. This was his first voyage as an officer, and the Molyneux looked very trifling and very gaunt by contrast with the ravening horror that surged all about her.

"She needs watching—don't take your eye off her," the mate said. "I'll tell the captain you're on deck—"

He said this to hearten the youngster, making no mention of what he expected to find when he went below. He found even more than he expected—Lyons had wakened from his stupor and was now gulping down fresh alcohol. He blinked foolishly as Sellerman shot into his cabin and turned to slam the door nimbly to keep out the gray water that was chasing him.

"Should always knock before entering captain'sh cabin," he said seriously. "Discipline, y'know—discipline."

Sellerman schooled himself to meekness, though disgust tore at his soul.

"The gale is increasing, sir—young Wilmot is on deck."

"Very good. Smart youngster, that—knows how to wear a uniform. Call me if it freshens."

He gaped foolishly at the mate, frowned, and, the liquor working within him, stutted: "I don't like you, Sellerman. You're—you're—damn it, you're no sailor, sir. Get out of my cabin!"

Sellerman looked at his senior and was conscious of a rash desire to shake him into sensibility. But Lyons, his hands trembling, was drinking again, in copious gulps, shuddering as the spirit poured down his throat. The mate made his exit, waded through sluicing water, and gained the saloon. The Molyneux was already recognizing the change in her handling; she was cavorting like a raving hippopotamus. Clamor was all about her; every plate and rivet chattered and creaked; and the smashing thunder of falling seas shook her to the keel.

Sellerman, wearied by his watch, jaded, weighted by the sense of responsibility, gulped down a cup of tepid coffee, swallowed a mouthful of food, and then clambered back to the bridge. It was quite apparent to him that he must see the old ship through her travail himself—fair or unfair, the sea demanded this of him. Throughout the livelong day he kept the

bridge, save when it was necessary to fare down to the decks to rally the crew, to set them to work in making further defenses against the inroads of the devouring waters; and night found the Molyneux's mate still laboring hard.

The miracle of it all was that the ship still survived. Only a man who understood her every humor could have nursed her through her tribulations, for by now the gale was reaching its height and the outlook was enough to stop the heartbeats of the bravest man. But Sellerman had forgotten his long disappointment; he had forgotten the injustice meted out to him, as he had forgotten the heedless coward in the cabin beneath the bridge.

It was the ship he was fighting for—the old Molyneux—a ship to trust. The primary instincts of the born sea-fighter were ablaze in his soul—it was now a personal matter betwixt himself and the sea. He fought as he would have fought had the command been given to him; and he thrilled with a half-forgotten happiness as he watched the gameness of the old ship.

She was wonderful—wonderful. It was as though she drew something from Sellerman's strength and enthusiasm—she was a living miracle now, no longer a mere bulk of inanimate metal. She possessed tricks of cunning that enabled her to meet the sea's terrible onslaughts; but above all she was stalwart and game, fearing no knock-down blows; always coming up to time when the need was greatest. She was thrown this way and that as the elements willed; she was borne down by monstrous masses of devouring water; there were times when even Sellerman, who knew her, said that she could no longer survive; but always she uprose again, streaming, stripped and forlorn, but terrible always—a ship a man might trust with his honor and his life.

"You beauty!" gasped the mate as the night ended to give place to a wan steel-hued dawn that was more terrible even than the danger-hiding night. He revelled in the terrifying splendor of the scene that unveiled itself before his eyes. In a welter of surging water that rose and fell and rose again, the stripped and battered Molyneux toiled steadfastly.

The everlasting sprays that had deluged her had frozen in their falling, so that she showed now as a reeling iceberg. The wind was of maniacal force, tearing at the upper-works with frenzied fingers as though determined to pluck the ship piece from piece and toss the fragments broadcast. From the misted horizons enormous combers that grew enormously, ran in monotonous might. The riotous air was thick with flying salt that stung the exposed face bitterly, that was acrid on a man's panting lips. But Sellerman, exulting, laughed. He and the ship he loved were winning—winning.

He swung suddenly about as something heavy whizzed past his ear, to see Lyons—white-faced, shivering, his face contorted horribly. The captain's hand still gripped the weighty belaying pin with which he had aimed the blow. He lifted the weapon again.

"You swine!" he screeched. "You've—you've—" The ship poised, reeled, plunged tremendously, chattering and groaning as though in her death-agonies, and Lyons screeched again.

"We're sinking!" he said. "Call all hands—abandon ship; d'you hear me? Abandon ship!"

The much liquor he had imbibed had told on him; his bloodshot eyes were the eyes of a maniac. "My God!" he mouthed—and clung helplessly to the ice-thickened rails as the Molyneux roared upward again. He made a staggering run to the wheel, wrested the spokes from the helmsman's grip, twirled them foolishly.

"I'll show you who's captain here!" he screamed. "I'll show you! Abandon ship!" The Molyneux writhed and shivered to his touch. A vast sea towered high and fell on the decks.

"You blasted fool!" thundered Sellerman, fighting for possession of the wheel.

"Mutiny—by God!" yelled Lyons, and struck at the mate's face. "Give me my ship. Abandon her—my orders! I'll shoot—"

He fumbled in his clothing; but, tearing him away from the wheel as if he had been a barnacle, Sellerman held him off with one hand, what time he nursed the troubled fabric into greater ease.

"You shall not abandon her—the worst's over," he cried clearly.

As he spoke the words temptation clawed at him. It would be so easy to let Lyons have his own way. So easy to get rid of him. The man was a white-livered coward; merely a thing of sounding brass who failed when the real emergencies arose; he would never be missed. Why not make a pretense of abandoning the Molyneux? It could be done skillfully. All that was necessary was to clear away a boat—be sure the coward would run for it like the scared cur he was the minute it was swung out—and the kindly sea would do the rest.

A boat could not live an hour in the tumult then raging. And he—Sellerman—would be left in charge of the ship; he would bring her safely through her travail; he would earn the encomiums of the owners, and the very least they could do would be to give him permanent command of the ship he had saved. He had nothing but hatred and contempt for Captain Lyons—the man who flew to drink when trouble was abroad, the man who had ousted his subordinate from a job that was his by every law of the sea, and who left that subordinate to carry on when his own nerve failed.

Another gigantic comber lifted, swooped—it swept the bridge, it tore the sailor who had been at the wheel from his holding and flung him, stunned and broken, to leeward. White water swirled about captain and mate; they were deluged to their shoulders; then gasped and choked, still fighting for the wheel.

"Let go—see to the boats!" gulped Lyons.

For answer, Sellerman swung his fist in a hard uppercut. The captain's head snapped back. Sprawling he went to the deck, but the sluicing water over his face saved his consciousness. He turned that malicious face for a moment on the mate, his mouth opened and shut foolishly, like a dying fish's mouth; then he scrambled on all fours to the ladder-head and disappeared.

Sellerman sucked his abraded knuckles and turned to give his entire attention to the staggering ship—not a moment before

it was needed. For the Molyneux was now entering the vortex of the gale; the wind was dying down, whirling in mad spirals and eddies; and the sea beggared all description. It rose in pyramids to the height of the laboring fabric's trucks; it was as though the sinister wavetops reached to meet the drooping, hideous wrack of ragged black cloud that was everywhere overhead. A livid yellow light, unnatural, horrible, suffused the atmosphere—the air seemed well-nigh impossible to breathe.

"We're in for it now," muttered Sellerman; and forgot all other matters as he braced himself for the biggest fight of his life. Ten hours later he reeled from the shattered bridge, knowing that he had won. The Molyneux was saved; torn and disheveled as she was, her cargo below decks had suffered small harm; she was still a struggling entity, pulsing purposefully ahead toward the haven of her desire.

Sellerman rapped on the captain's cabin door and entered. Lyons lay huddled on the bunk, half-dressed. There were more empty bottles washing about the filthy floor; the captain breathed stertorously. The great bruise on his face showed black against the gross purple of his skin.

"It's your finish," Lyons said curtly. In speaking, he quite failed to meet the mate's glance; he looked anywhere save at that weather-beaten countenance.

"Or yours, which?" asked the mate quietly. The Molyneux was in smooth waters now; her travails were over. In a few hours more she would make fast at her destined port. Since the termination of the gale Sellerman had seen but little of his senior; Lyons had appeared to avoid him of set purpose. And two men can see surprisingly little of each other even aboard a tramp freighter when they so make up their minds.

"Your finish!" said Lyons doggedly.

He was almost sober now, and all his nastiness was on the surface. His voice shook, his nostrils were white and pinched. He strove for self-control.

"I'll break you," he snarled. "Gross insubordination—mutiny, by God! You struck me—on the bridge."

"After you'd ordered me to abandon a seaworthy ship," retorted Sellerman.

"That's a lie. I gave no such order."

"You were drunk when you did it, yes; but you gave the order, Captain Lyons."

"Got witnesses?" Lyons knew that the one other man present on the bridge during the altercation was still insensible—his fall had damaged his skull badly. And Sellerman bit his lip, aware of the weight of circumstances.

"It's your word against mine; and I'm captain," said Lyons bitterly. "Your word—and it's known that you've hated me all along. You've envied me my promotion over your head. You've been insubordinate constantly. Yes, you're finished. A man doesn't strike me and go around feeling happy after it. Tell your side of the yarn and see how many'll believe it. The minute I get ashore I make a statement at the office. I'll see you starving on the beach, my man. My word to the owners settles you."

He made a gesture of dismissal, and Sellerman walked away with a heavy step. He was aware of fear, of rage, of hatred. It was all so grossly unfair, somehow. He had done his best to save the ship, but—he saw no chance to save himself. And there was Molly, too. Dismissal meant—what? Ruin, of course. He was to be sacrificed to save Lyons. Lyons was a small-souled man, afraid lest his pitiful behavior during the ordeal should come to light.

"My God, it isn't fair, it isn't fair!" the mate stammered as he sat down heavily in his own cabin. He drew the fair copy of the ship's log toward him, and turned its pages. He had embroidered the bald account of the storm as entered up in the scrap log kept on the bridge; he read his entries now:

"Gale increasing to hurricane force; sea very high. Captain took charge."

"Hurricane now at its height; captain on bridge."

There were several such entries. He had determined to help Lyons to the best of his ability, because the law of the sea ran that a man must always stand by a shipmate in danger or trouble. It was too late to erase those entries, too—and if he attempted to

refute the captain's statements, his own written words would be brought up as evidence against him. He sank his face in his hands and gulped—it wasn't fair.

Lyons's face was bitterly hostile as he made for the gangway. The Molyneux was fast to the wharf forward; aft, the second mate and his watch were heaving her alongside. Lyons had ordered a gangway ashore at once; he was in haste to get his story to the owners' ears. His friendship with Brent would count heavily in his favor—and who would take the word of a disgruntled mate against a skipper's?

Impatiently he leaped to the narrow plank that had been thrust from ship to shore. As he went there was a sudden detonation, like the discharge of a gun. The six inch line aft, on which the powerful winch was heaving, had parted like a pack-thread.

"Look out, sir" some one yelled the warning—a fraction of a second too late. The ship's stern swung out into the dock,

the plank gangway slid. Lyons made a mad leap, wavered on the stringpiece, that was wet and muddy, failed to find a footing. He gave a screeching cry as he scraped with futile hands at the slimy timbers of the dock.

"Give a shove in, skipper!" shouted the second mate to the master of the stern tug. The man who had shoved the gangplank ashore ran to the rail, white-faced. He suddenly clapped his hands to his mouth and shouted—shouted. It was too late; the stern tug was thrusting the Molyneux into the wharf with all her power. Between the ship's sheer side and the stone wall of the wharf was a narrow stretch of foul water, with a white, horrified face thrust upward from the scum.

"Hold on aft—for God's sake!" screamed the man, and looked again.

This time was no stretch of water between ship and shore—there was no white face. Lyons, crushed like an egg, was at the bottom of the dock.



"THAT'S WHERE YOUR CHEST BEGINS"

(With apologies to the author of "Out Where the West Begins")

WHEN relatives say you're a splendid writer
And exclaim that Bernard Shaw's no brighter,
That's where your chest begins;
When your best girl says that no eyes are bluer,
And adds to that that no heart beats truer,
When she tells you your kind is getting fewer,
That's where your chest begins.

When your friends admit that you're really clever,
When they say that your name will live forever,
That's where your chest begins;
When you think for your words the world is sighing,
And that hundreds of girls for you are crying,
When you think that your fame must be undying,
That's where your chest begins.

Up 'neath the spot where your Adam's apple
Bobs up and down when you gulp your scrapple,
That's where your chest begins;
But sometimes, my friend, through overeating,
Or on hot mince pie and cheese repeating,
You find where your belt and vest are meeting,
That's where your chest begins.

Percy Waxman.



Gentleman Roger's Girl

By **HULBERT FOOTNER**

Author of "A New Girl in Town," "A Self-Made Thief," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

CELESTA MANION, beautiful, high-principled and courageous, flees from the convent and journeys to the distant prison where, she has just learned accidentally, her father, Roger Manion, is incarcerated "under a trumped-up charge." Arriving unannounced she finds him in the visitors' room with good-looking Cora Divert masquerading as his daughter. Gentleman Roger instantly pretends that the girls are sisters and they play-act the part to deceive the prison guards. Later he explains to confiding Celesta that Cora is his secretary. Celesta had met on the train Hal Bainton, newly appointed medical assistant at the prison, and he now has Manion transferred to the infirmary where the privileges are greater. Here Gentleman Roger pursues his scheme for counterfeiting millions in Liberty Bonds. Unknown to him, Campas, a doctor convict whose time is nearly expired, plans to bring about Manion's escape with the hope of gaining favor with Celesta. Celesta and young Dr. Bainton leave the prison yard in his runabout and then she reveals that her "martyr" father, drugged by Campas, is in the back space of the car. Primarily to keep her out of Campas's clutches in the future, Hal decides to become a fugitive with father and daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HILLS.

AT the next cross street they turned to the right, that is to say, away from the river.

"Why do we go this way?" Celesta asked.

"It leads into an avenue that runs behind the prison," Hal replied. "We'll circle

around the prison, and cross the Tappahannock river a mile above. From the other side we can reach the Corbyhanna across country."

"Then where?"

"Montebello. I have friends there who will help us."

"Won't they guess we have gone back there?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 31.

"Maybe. But they'll never think we went that way. All travel East goes along the Tappaghany."

"Hal, when you lifted the top, did father speak to you?"

"He was doped. I saw that when I was at the infirmary. Probably won't wear off for a couple of hours."

"Ah-h!" Celesta murmured painfully.

"How much money have you got?" asked Hal bluntly.

"About twenty-five dollars."

"I have fifteen. It will do if we don't break anything."

A few minutes later, passing along the higher ground back of the river, Hal called attention to the dark mass of the prison below them.

"You mustn't be frightened if they blow the siren," he said. "Campas may give the alarm at any time. God knows whether he wants us to get away or to be caught. Who can tell what goes through the mind of a man like that!"

As her nerves quieted down, Celesta began to have her own doubts about Campas. Things slowly assumed their proper perspective.

"Hal, do you hate me for what I have done?" she whispered low.

"No! No!" he answered. "You couldn't know what sort of man he was."

They struck into the river road again, and presently rattled over the loose flooring of the old bridge. They had no more than crossed it when the night was shattered by a hideous shriek. It was repeated over and over, rising to an inhuman shrillness; a sound that tore at the nerves. Celesta clapped her hands to her mouth to keep from crying out. She was shaking like a reel.

"Just a big steam whistle, keep that in mind," Hal murmured reassuringly. "It's intended to break your nerve." He slowed down. "Mustn't appear to be running away from it."

Cross country through more or less fashionable suburbs of Clayton, over the ridge that separated the two water-sheds, and down to the banks of the Corbyhanna; such was their route. Along the Corbyhanna for mile after mile stretched furnaces and

mills. It was still early in the night and there were other cars abroad among which they were in nowise conspicuous, bowling along at a rapid but not a headlong rate. Which way the pursuit went, if there was any pursuit, they had no means of knowing.

"I don't think they'll do anything to-night," Hal said, "except run down the main road after us. A search by automobile is not practicable by night. While they're stopping to inquire which way we went, we're always gaining on them."

He listened with a practiced ear to the many voices of a motor car. "Wish I'd had time to give her a thorough overhauling," he remarked. "She sounds all right. That rattle you hear is only a loose starter chain. Good for many a mile yet."

On the whole they had not much to say to each other. Hal was busy planning. As for Celesta, thinking over what they had done, she was more and more dismayed.

"This will ruin you!" she faltered.

"Nonsense!" said Hal gruffly. "Nobody can ruin me but myself!"

They mounted into rougher country, leaving the industrial world abruptly behind. They saw no more cars now. Gradually the valley narrowed to a gorge. Sometimes the river roared over stones; sometimes for long stretches it lay confined deep and still between its lofty banks.

A wasted moon rose over the hills at their left, casting a wan bloom on the opposite face of the gorge. According to the nature of the obstructions that opposed it, the road now ran along the bottom of the gorge, and now crept high around a shoulder of the hills. Dazzled by the headlights, all they could see of the wild panorama was an occasional glimpse into a black void as they rounded a bend, and the dark masses of the hills rising against the pale sky.

Celesta's thoughts were mostly with her father. Every now and then she would murmur: "I hope he's all right!"

Hal said: "Mustn't stop to take him out until we have to."

"I suppose they'll telegraph a description of us everywhere," said Celesta nervously.

"If everything holds we'll be over the State line before daybreak."

"Can't they arrest us in the next state?"

"Oh, they can, of course, but they won't be so keen about it. Anyhow we'll lie under cover all day to-morrow, and, before the next morning breaks, we'll be safe in the garage in Montebello. I know that town!"

When they had been on the road a couple of hours Celesta, whose ears were continually stretched in that direction, insisted that she heard sounds from the luggage compartment. Hal ran on until he came to a side road, a mere stony track that left the highway and climbed the bank. Turning into it and mounting until they were out of sight of the main road, he stopped his car, and they got out. Pine trees hemmed them in on both sides of the narrow road, but the moon struck down a shaft of light between.

Hal unscrewed the top of the luggage compartment and lifted it off. A tousled head and a bristling mustache rose into view with many groans. At first Roger could only hold his head between his hands and groan.

"Father! Father!" murmured Celesta, seeking to put her arms around him.

But he impatiently pushed her away. He had not fully come to his senses yet. He began to curse in a low, thick voice. Sulphurous curses. Celesta gasped.

"He doesn't know what he's saying," Hal said quickly. "Better walk away a little."

Celesta with burning cheeks made haste to obey.

Hal grasped Roger's shoulder and shook him roughly. "Pull yourself together, man! Celesta is here. You don't want her to hear such talk!"

"Oh, God! every inch of me is pounded to a jelly!" groaned Roger.

"Stand up," said Hal. "I'll help you out."

With many groans Roger was assisted to the ground, where he stood swaying under the pines in his flowered dressing-gown, an inch or two of pyjama leg showing below. His language was still lurid.

"Cut it out! Cut it out!" commanded Hal.

"Who the hell are you?" demanded Roger suddenly.

"Bainton."

"Bainton!" Roger stared. "Where am I? What is this place? What has happened?"

"Well, Campas got you out of jail," said Hal, feeling rather foolish.

For a moment or two Roger stared in silence. Then the storm broke. What had gone before was mere preliminary rumblings. Hal gazed anxiously in the direction Celesta had taken. He could not see her.

"You fool! You fool! You fool! You don't know what you've done!" Such was the burden of the exasperated man's cries.

"You needn't thank me for it," said Hal grimly.

"Thank you!" cried Roger. "You fool, you've ruined me with your meddling! Destroyed the work of years!"

"What do you mean?" Hal demanded sharply.

Roger suddenly pulled himself up. Turning his back on Hal, he vented his rage in impotent gestures and groaning oaths directed at the trees.

Celesta suddenly appeared out of the gloom. "I couldn't stay away," she faltered. "What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know," Hal answered shortly.

Celesta went and put her arm around Roger. "Dear dad, aren't you happy to be here with us?" she murmured.

Roger laughed insanely, and Celesta shrank back dismayed.

"What did they give him?" she gasped.

"Oh, God! was any man ever so cursed with a pair of meddlesome young fools!" groaned Roger.

Celesta tried again. "Father!" she murmured.

Roger tried to pull himself together. Whatever had happened, his whole scheme of life still depended on his maintaining a noble character in the eyes of Celesta. But it was hard! To be denied an outlet for his righteous anger hurt him worse than his bruises. He gave the appearance of a man awaking from a delirium.

"Daughter!" he murmured, holding out his arms.

Celesta flung herself into them. The scene made Hal exquisitely uneasy. The man's part in it did not ring true. Hal

could not rid himself of the feeling that there was a particular reason, likely a sinister reason, for Roger's strange outburst of rage.

"We've got to get on," Hal said in embarrassed fashion. "Celesta brought you a complete outfit in this satchel. Celesta and I will leave you to dress. Sorry I can't let you have a light. It would be dangerous while the car's standing."

Hal and Celesta climbed the stony track a few paces further, and stood in silence. The moonlight made a curious checkered pattern, gray and black, of the splintered stones in the road, and brought out a tinge of green in the black of the trees.

The moon was behind Celesta's head, dusting the edges of her hair with pale gold. By contrast the twin pools of her eyes were as deep and dark as holes in the night sky between the stars. Of what she was thinking Hal could not guess. For himself, a wave of tenderness simply inundated his breast.

"Celesta, I would die to make you happy," he murmured.

It never reached her. She was already speaking before he was through:

"I ought to be back there helping him in the dark. Do you suppose he will catch cold, changing in the open air?"

Hal sighed. "I don't think so," he said.

They heard Roger's irritable voice. "Good God! what sort of clothes are these! You didn't bring me any socks."

They were on the road again. Nothing had passed in the high road while they lay concealed. They now rode squeezed three abreast in the runabout. Celesta in the middle. They had explained the circumstances of his rescue to Roger and now they rode in silence. There was really nothing to say. The light from the cowl lamp revealed two deep perpendicular furrows in Roger's forehead. He continually stroked his mustache. Celesta nursed his free hand between both of hers.

A stern chase is a long one, but Hal was well aware of the disastrous possibilities of even the briefest of stops. On every bend of the road which permitted it, he glanced anxiously back the way they had come. He pushed the car as fast as he dared over the

rough and unfamiliar road. Celesta caught her breath at some of the turns they made. Rogers protested against being flung up against the top.

They were roaring up an incline with wide open exhaust when suddenly there was a sharp report from under the engine hood, and the roaring was silenced. Hal worked his throttle lever up and down in vain. They ran on up to the top of the hill under their acquired momentum, and stopped. Hal ground on his emergency brake, and jumped out without a word. He was not one of the noisy sort.

"What has happened?" gasped Celesta.

"Something in the ignition," he said. "Tell you in a minute."

"It only needed this!" murmured Roger with concentrated bitterness.

"Mr. Manion, will you keep watch down the road?" said Hal. "We're on a sort of point here. You can see a long way down the valley. Celesta, you hold the trouble light for me."

With swift, precise movements he set to work to test generator, distributor, switches, fuses, spark plugs, etc. It was comforting to watch so sure a workman. But for the same reason, the final way in which he raised up from his work and let his arms drop, was more destructive to the hopes of his watchers than a torrent of profanity would have been.

"Coil's burned out," he said.

"Can't you fix it?" gasped Celesta.

He shook his head, and started wiping his hands on a piece of waste. "Coil's a thing you can't fix. When it goes it's gone."

"Isn't there anything you can do?"

Another shake. "She's dead as a rotten log until I can put a new coil into her."

"What shall we do?"

"Walk." The single syllable quivered with bitterness.

"And leave the car here like a sign-post to point the way we've taken?" queried Roger sarcastically.

Hal looked down at the river. He was silent for a moment. "Going to shove her over," he muttered finally.

"Oh, Hal! No! No!" cried Celesta. "Your car means so much to you! You worked so hard on it! I can't let you!"

"No help for it," said Hal. To Roger he said: "Help me to get her turned."

They were on the shoulder of a hill that sloped steeply down some hundred feet or so to the water. In this place the river ran deep and still. The moon was now almost directly overhead, and the whole gorge was filled with its pale light. The two men maneuvered the car this way and that in the road, until they got it pointed squarely down hill. Hal let down the top of the car and fastened it. He lashed the steering wheel to the posts of the windshield.

"Now!" he said.

The two men put their shoulders to her and heaved her over the edge. As she started to move Hal reached in and turned on the light switch.

"Let her go down blazing!" he said.

Celesta turned away her head. Hal watched his car with a catch in his breath, how she plunged down, gathering speed with every foot, her headlights cleaving a way through the night. Near the bottom she struck a ledge, bounded clear of the earth, and landed with a shattered crash fairly in the river. The wildly tumbled water quickly subsided. In a few seconds it was mirror-like in the moonlight.

"She's covered," Hal remarked.

The tears were running down Celesta's cheeks.

"Come on, let's go," Hal said curtly.

Celesta, aware that even she could not comfort him at such a moment, let him trudge on alone. She and her father followed. She whispered to Roger:

"Do you feel equal to walking, dear?"

Roger was not so merciful. Raising his voice a little he said with a martyred air: "I am in the hands of you and your friend, my dear."

Hal heard him.

CHAPTER X.

THE GYPSIES.

THE three fugitives were lying asleep on a grassy bed in a little, open wood.

It was broad day and the sun was gilding the light green leaves of the poplars and young beeches.

Celesta and her father lay side by side, Hal a few paces distant. Celesta had a coat to cover her. The men had nothing.

Some dozen yards or so beyond where Hal was lying, the high road ran through a cut. Lying on higher ground than the road, the sleepers were protected from the chance discovery of any passer-by.

Although he was wearied by many miles of walking, Hal's ears were still on guard while he slept. He suddenly sat up broad awake, to listen. The sound which had aroused him was the exhaust of a rapidly approaching vehicle. He cautiously crept through the undergrowth to the edge of the cut bank, and lying at full length peered down at the road through a screen of leaves.

He presently saw what he expected to see, two motorcycles ridden by men in the trim, khaki uniform of the State constabulary. Like any fugitive at the sight of that uniform, Hal's face hardened bitterly. The machines coughed by at a high rate of speed. The riders' eyes were perfunctorily bent on the road looking for tracks. Driving at that rate they could see nothing. The old stone road full of ruts and holes yielded but little at the best. The mere fact that they had come so far, showed that they were not upon the tracks they were looking for.

The sound of their exhaust was slowly swallowed in the distance. Hal returned to his friends. The place they were in was as safe as any place, and he saw no object in waking them.

He dropped to his knees beside Celesta's bed in the grass, and for a few moments remained gazing down at her with inexpressible wistfulness. How like a child she looked, with her curved black lashes lying on her clear cheeks, and her enchanting lips, lips which stabbed Hal with their beauty, now a little petulant with weariness and grief.

Hal, throwing a sharp, hard glance at Roger to make sure he slept, awkwardly ducked his head, and kissed the collar of Celesta's coat where it had fallen a little from her face. Then he retreated guiltily to his own place and lay down again. For awhile he gazed dreamily at Celesta, then his eyes closed, too.

Some time later all three were simultaneously awakened by a gruff command. They sat up to behold a rough-looking man staring down at them. A mongrel hound cringed at his heels. It was to the dog that his commands were addressed.

The man seemed almost as disturbed as the awakened sleepers. Distrust and fear struggled in his bright, shallow black eyes, like a wild animal's eyes. In self-protection he affected an air of clownish stupidity. Although his clothes were rough and worn, he carried an expensive double-barrelled gun, beautifully kept. He was extraordinarily dark and swarthy, foreign looking, yet with no recognizable racial characteristics. His villainous look was partly due to a bad scar which bisected one of his eyebrows.

Of the rudely awakened fugitives Hal had the most self-possession. He took out his case and helped himself to a cigarette. Hal had already adopted a guiding maxim in life: "When in doubt, make the other fellow speak first."

Roger, more impulsive, burst out: "What are you doing here?"

"Just what I was astin' myself about you, boss, returned the man with a leer.

Roger discomposed, fell silent. Hal said:

"We lost our car in an accident down the road, and had to hoof it. Have a cigarette?"

"Huh!" said the man scornfully. Nevertheless he took one.

"Live around here?" asked Hal.

"I'm a traveler like yourself," was the answer. "I trade horses."

"Oh, I see!" said Hal, somewhat relieved. The more questionable the fellow's occupation, the better for them under the circumstances.

"Yes, I'm a gypsy if you want to know it," the man added truculently.

"I've got nothing against gypsies," Hal declared.

"How about his nibs yonder?" asked the man with a jerk of his thumb in Roger's direction.

Roger had recovered his sang-froid. "I'm a gypsy myself at heart," he said.

It was over the man's head. He merely grunted.

"Is your camp near here?" Hal asked.

"Not far," was the cautious reply.

"Can you give us some breakfast? You see we have nothing."

"Can you pay for it?"

"We can."

"I dunno. It's pretty rough. I'll ask the women. You wait here." He made off among the trees.

Roger jumped up. "Come on, let's make tracks out of here," he said nervously.

But Hal sat tight. "What's the use?" he argued. "We wouldn't get a mile."

"I wouldn't trust a fellow like that," insisted Roger. "Rogue is written all over him!"

"We have no choice," said Hal. "If he doesn't know already who we are, he soon will. Our best plan is to make friends with his gang. The more rogues they are, the less likely to give us up. We've got to have help from somebody. Celesta must be fed."

Choosing a moment when Celesta was looking elsewhere, Hal slipped a revolver from his hip pocket to the side pocket of his coat.

"Have you got another?" Roger whispered.

Hal shook his head.

In a quarter of an hour the gypsy returned without his gun or dog. "'S all right," he said briefly. "Come on. Cost you a dollar each."

Hal made a wry face at the price, but there was no help for it.

The man with the scar led the way directly into the woods. They began to climb, and leaving the deciduous trees behind them, plunged into thick second growth pine. There was no undergrowth here, but the slender trunks sprang so close together they had to pick a circuitous course among them, and the sharp spines tore at their clothes and their flesh. The slippery carpet of needles afforded only a treacherous footing. They instinctively followed their guide in Indian file.

"Spread out, spread out," he snarled over his shoulder. "Do you want to leave a wide open trail?"

They obeyed, and then their progress was so slow he often had to wait ill-temperedly for them to catch up.

They topped the rise, and half walked, half slid down the other side. Suddenly they came out on the gypsy encampment snugly hidden in a hollow amid more poplars and beeches and young oaks. There was a spring hard by, and an abandoned wood road which presumably led back to the highway somewhere. It was a lovely spot, but the humans defaced it sadly.

There were two torn brown tents. Inside they had glimpses of hideously dirty cotton comforters. The women were not dressed for parade, and Celesta shuddered at the state of their hair and hands. Nevertheless it was a prosperous outfit; the wagons were newly painted in the crude colors with rococo ornaments dear to gypsies, and their horses were in good condition.

In addition to the man with the scar, there were four men and three women. The leader was a one-armed man of great physical strength.

The secrecy of their camp, and the fact that they were traveling light, without children, suggested to Hal that this was a flying column, despatched on some mysterious gypsy mission. There was a beautiful bay mare tethered to a tree. Hal suspected she had something to do with their mission.

The three fugitives sat down on the ground, and their breakfast was brought them in tin cups and plates. It consisted of a muddy decoction that passed as coffee, thick slices of salt pork fried, and rude hunks of corn bread baked before an open fire. Hal glimpsed two dead rabbits, the spoils, no doubt, of the tall gypsy's hunting; but these were not included in the bill of fare. Celesta had had no knowledge that food such as this existed; nevertheless she ate it gratefully.

As soon as they had finished, the leader, who was called "Wingy," took their money and jerked a grimy thumb in the direction of the wood road. "That 'll take you back to the main road," he said.

Hal, who heard, or thought he heard, the distant murmur of a motorcycle, was in no haste to move. "When are you going to pull out?" he asked.

"Soon," was the evasive answer.

"Which way are you going?"

"Sou'east."

"As far as Westmoreland?" Westmoreland was the first city over the State line.

"Maybe."

"The young lady is tired walking," said Hal. "Will you carry us with you?"

Wingy looked at the aged woman, who evidently enjoyed the first voice in their counsels.

"How much you pay?" she demanded of Hal in a shrill squall.

"We ride inside one of the wagons," specified Hal.

This was received with meaning, derisive grins. The gypsies perfectly understood the desire to travel under cover. Hal perceived that the price would be quadrupled.

"All right," said Wingy. "How much you pay "

"Fifteen dollars."

"Fifty dollars," she insisted.

"I haven't got it."

A bargain was finally struck at twenty-five, and Wingy collected on the spot.

At once the gypsies began to strike camp. Clearly they were in more of a hurry than they had permitted to appear. In a remarkably short time everything was packed in the wagons, and the horses were hitched. There were several spare nags.

The cavalcade presently set out upon the wood road, not in the direction of the highway, but still deeper into the woods. The blooded mare was ridden by the tall gypsy in the van. Wingy told the three fugitives they'd have to walk until they got out of the woods.

"Bad going," he said. "Wagon maybe turn over."

Obviously the road had not been traveled in a long time. Hal worked as hard as any of them in clearing the way, but could not see that it improved his position. They still grinned at him in their inscrutable, half derisive way.

It took them three hours to cover a distance of perhaps three miles. Hal gathered from their muttered imprecations among themselves directed at "yellow-jackets," that it was the presence of the State constables on the main road that had forced them to make this arduous detour.

At noon the tall gypsy rode back to re-

port that there was an open road ahead. Before venturing out upon it they paused for another meal no different from the first.

Afterward one of the wagons was unloaded, Celesta, Roger and Hal were placed in the center of it, and a barricade of goods built up behind them. A curtain hung down over the back of the wagon and was tied at the bottom. Inside it was almost completely dark, and very dusty and smelly. Little shuttered apertures along the top of the sides let in a certain amount of air, but they could not see out of them. Wingy drove this wagon, and it led the other two. They had already seen how Wingy wrapped the reins around the stump of his right arm and wielded the whip with the other. Beside him rode the youngest of the gypsies, a stripling, Wingy's son.

There is little to be said about that endless afternoon's ride. The heat, the racket, the smell, the jolting, created the acme of discomfort for the unfortunate three in their dark cell. Hal and Celesta sought to keep up each other's spirits by repeating how lucky they were to get so good a hiding place, and at the same time to be traveling in the direction they wished to go. Roger, wishing to stand well in Celesta's eyes, too, likewise made light of their situation—but with a difference. He was still the martyr.

Hal figured that they stuck to back roads, avoiding all towns and villages, for he heard no sounds of any traffic, nor any voices save those of the gypsies. He made endless calculations of the distance they had gone; say six miles an hour at the trot, three at a walk; by five o'clock he began to hope they were near the State line, or perhaps over it.

About this time they came to a town. The horses shoes rang on concrete pavements, the wheels rolled smoothly. They heard all the sounds of a town: dogs barking, motors chugging, the shuffle of feet on the sidewalks, the slap of screen doors. They passed through without pausing, and hit a dirt road once more.

Half an hour later the wagon turned out of the road, lurched over a ditch, turned around and came to a stop. Wingy jumped down, unfastened the curtain at the rear, and pulled out some of the goods.

"We're going to spell here," he said.

"You can get out and stretch if you want, but you better stick close to the wagon, so's you can duck if anybody comes."

It was good to see daylight again. The gypsies had turned in at the edge of a patch of woods alongside the road, not a main road from the look of it. Hal could see for a considerable distance along it in either direction. They were in the middle of a rich, flat farming country. The hills were far to the west.

Hal helped Wingy unharness and feed his horses. "How far are we from Montebello?" he asked.

"Matter of ten miles," said Wingy. "Soon as it gets dark you can see the lights against the sky from here."

"Good!" Hal exclaimed. "Are we over the State line?"

"Passed it half a mile back. Ain't got no nosey yellow-jackets here," he added.

Hal felt easier in mind.

He missed the boy who had been riding with Wingy earlier in the day. "Where's your son?" he asked.

"He dropped off in the town back yonder to see the sights," said Wingy. "He'll be along directly."

Hal's heart went slowly down again. Wingy's unchanged demeanor suggested that he had not learned who they were. But the boy might hear something in the town.

For safety's sake the three fugitives ate their supper inside the wagon. It was the same as breakfast and dinner. Roger refused his point blank; Celesta struggled to eat a few mouthfuls. The gypsy boy came along the road, whistling vociferously, and Hal's heart began to beat quickly. He strolled back to the fire. When the boy came up Hal saw that he had a newspaper in his hand, and he steeled himself. It was freshly folded; it had not been read. The boy dropped it on his father's knees, and reached down to get his supper which had been saved for him.

Hal was sitting on the opposite side of the fire from Wingy. "Let me have a look at it when you're through," he said coolly.

"Sure," Wingy agreed.

Wingy spread the paper and put on a pair of old-fashioned spectacles.

Under pretense of shoving a stick into the fire, Hal got up on his knees and read the headlines upside down:

ROGER MANION ESCAPES FROM PRISON

**Young Prison Doctor Smuggles Him
Out in His Car.**

Underneath, in black face type within a "box," Hal read:

\$1,000 REWARD!

**The Prison Commission Offers
the Above Sum.**

Wingy held the newspaper up and began to read.

Hal made his face like a mask. A price on their heads! That was what he had feared. How could the gypsies be expected to refuse it? He felt pretty near desperate.

True, he had a gun in his pocket, but what could he do against so many? He was well assured that the gypsies were provided with a regular arsenal. Futile to take to their heels down the road! Futile to try to slip into the woods and hide! All he could do was sit tight and wait to see how Wingy would take it.

Wingy held the newspaper up in front of his face for a long time; longer than was necessary for him to read the story, Hal suspected. One of the tethered horses began to squeal and kick. Wingy jumped up in seeming passion, letting the spread newspaper fall. It fell squarely on the fire and instantly blazed up. It was neatly done.

"Ah! He means to give us up!" thought Hal.

The three gypsy women were seated a little way off without any fire. Wingy, after giving the offending horse a kick, went to them and whispered with the old woman. The man with the scar and the other two grown men sauntered over and joined them one by one. But their consultation was brief. Wingy came back to Hal with the evil grin which never changed, and which gave away nothing.

"We've decided to go right on," he said. "Guess you ain't sorry."

"Good work!" said Hal. He had thought

of a plan, a crazy plan, to be sure, but it was something to work on.

The gypsies packed up with their customary expedition. Darkness was well advanced when they started. The last thing Hal saw before he climbed into the wagon was the man with the scar mounted on the bay mare starting off alone. He turned to the left in the road; that is to say in an easterly direction, toward Montebello.

"Getting incriminating evidence out of the way," thought Hal.

The goods were piled in behind them, but not so carefully as before. Wingy climbed on the box and cracked his whip. As they crossed the ditch it was easy enough for Hal to tell from the lurch of the wagon that they turned to the right; *i. e.*, back across the line into the State where the reward was offered. This was what he expected, of course.

In a rapid whisper Hal explained the situation to Celesta and Roger. They fell in with his plan, having nothing else to suggest. Notwithstanding his resentment at having been rescued out of prison, Roger had never suggested giving himself up or allowing himself to be taken. The hope of a pardon was knocked on the head.

Hal started moving the objects aside at the back. The rattle of the wheels effectually drowned any sounds that he made. He opened a passage at one side, and cautiously unfastening the curtain at the bottom, peeped out.

Wingy, by his very impatience to claim the reward, was aiding him. He had whipped his horses to a smart trot; he had the best pair in the outfit, and he had drawn away from the following wagon. That showed as a mere blur a hundred yards or so behind.

Hal whispered over his shoulder: "When I drop off, follow me. Do just as I do."

As soon as they left the patch of woods behind, there were none but single trees along the road. But in places the fence lines had grown up: there was a thick growth of sumac, elderberry, and other bushes. They turned a slight bend in the road and the following wagon was hidden by intervening bushes. More bushes rose alongside at Hal's right.

"Now!" he whispered, and dropped to the road.

Celesta and Roger quickly followed. Running on their toes they crossed a dry ditch, and crouching, pressed themselves into the thickest of the leaves. Behind the bushes there was a wire fence. They worked their bodies between the stems and pressed against the wire. The leaves closed behind them.

The second wagon passed in the road, the driver wielding the whip and cursing his horses. From inside the wagon came a muffled chatter of feminine voices. The third wagon was close behind the second. The sound of hoofs and wheels diminished.

Hal rose. "We must get over this fence," he said, "and strike straight across the fields till we came to another road. They may discover at any minute that we are gone."

Hal found a clear space, and they helped Celesta over. They found themselves in a field of young corn and set off down one of the rows at right angles to the fence. Off to their left, over a slight rise in the field, the sky showed a pale, colorless glow.

"The lights of Westmoreland," said Hal. "When you get as near as this to such a big town, all roads must lead there. We'll make it in three hours."

"Yes, and find them ready for us," said Roger gloomily. "The gypsies will raise the alarm."

"I doubt it," said Hal. "It's one thing to hand us over, but it's another to give information on the slim chance of collecting a reward later. They are not so anxious to call attention to themselves. It's more likely that they will spend the night looking for us on their own account. But we can hear their wagons farther than they can see us. When he get to town we're safe from them. Gypsies hate a town."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CUT.

WESTMORELAND, like all up-to-date industrial towns, had its slums.

The worst slum was down in the Cut in a wilderness of cinders between the

railway tracks and the discolored river. Not many self-respecting towns are favored with so good a hiding place for a slum. It was not a cut properly speaking, but a natural fissure for the stream to find its way out between cliffs of shale.

Up on top of the cliffs the better sort of people had their houses, and could promenade in the cooling breezes from the hills. But in July, down in the huddle of decrepit wooden houses among the cinders—well, the accepted term down there was Hell-hole.

A new family had lately taken possession of the upper floor of one of the little tenements. Among the very poor these comings and goings are too frequent to attract any attention. The newcomers showed a disposition to keep to themselves, and they were left alone. The family was supposed to consist of mother, son, and daughter, but since the day they came, nobody had laid eyes on the old woman. Bedridden, maybe.

The girl was said to be good looking, but didn't know how to make anything of herself. She went marketing in an old shawl like a Polack. The young fellow spent his days looking for work. He might better save his shoes these days, when every shop in town was laying off hands. There was no doubt about the family's poverty. Nothing but the barest necessities of living had been carried into their two rooms.

So much for the verdict of the Cut. Within the room in question Celesta was rolling and cutting biscuits on a table. She was wearing a cheap, ill-fitting cotton dress, and had further sought to make herself look plain and insignificant by screwing her hair back in a hard knot. Not with entire success, though; she was still lovely to anybody who had eyes to see. In spite of the heat, she looked cool. The heat was pressing down on the Cut like a steaming towel, and the room was even hotter, by reason of the rickety iron stove on which Celesta was cooking.

In addition to the stove and the deal table, the room contained only three kitchen chairs and two cheap cots, yet it did not look unhomelike, because Celesta looked at home there. She was intent and serene, almost smiling at the business of getting supper.

On one of the cots the supposed old woman was lying asleep. She had an odd figure for an old woman, being broad yet flat in front, and with uncommonly big and shapely feet. Her decidedly masculine face was crimson with the heat, and her wig was awry.

Through the open windows came the insistent noises of the neighborhood; the clangor of ill-tempered voices; the banging of shunting freight cars; the reverberation of trolley cars crossing the high level bridge. Underneath these customary sounds there was another sound like some one idiotically drumming on an instrument of three notes, and those out of tune, a feeble, insistent sound, more trying to the nerves than all the racket.

It was this sound which awoke the sleeper. She, or he, sat up in bed with a round oath in a barytone voice. "Can't I get a moment's forgetfulness in this hell hole? What is that noise?"

"Sh-h-h, dad!" said Celesta. "They'll hear you downstairs!"

"I ought to talk in a falsetto, eh?"

"No, only lower your voice."

He snatched the wig off and flung it on the floor. "What do I have to wear this rig for anyhow? It's degrading! I'm never allowed out of doors."

"But people come to the door," said Celesta. "And sometimes you go to the window without thinking."

"What is that infernal tinkling?" he cried.

"It's the Italian in the yard next door. All day he's been trying to fix his street piano."

Roger fell back on the cot, almost weeping out of self-pity. "A few days more of this will finish me! Nice position for a man like me!"

"Hal said the only place we would be safe was among very poor people," retorted Celesta patiently. "And we are safe here. They have never thought of looking in such a place."

"Safe!" he muttered. "It's just exchanging one prison for another!"

"Hal can't let you go out, because you can't walk or talk like a woman. You are always pulling at an imaginary mustache."

He was doing it now. "Well, I wore it for twenty-five years," he grumbled.

"It's only for a little while," she went on soothingly. "Just as soon as Hal finds work—"

This roused him to a fresh access of rage. "Hal! Hal! Hal!" he snarled. "How sick I am of hearing that name! Who gave him the right to order my life? Lord! I've even got to sleep in the room with him! Got to lie here at night and watch his ugly face!"

"That's unjust!" said Celesta warmly. "That's wrong of you! After all he has done! After the way he works for us!"

"I didn't ask him to do anything for me!"

"I have told you many times if anybody is to be blamed it must be me," Celesta reminded him firmly.

This silenced Roger for the moment. Relations between father and daughter had progressed a good deal. He had discovered that he could depend upon Celesta's patience, and it was an immense relief to give his ill temper a vent in her presence. But however bad his temper, he could not abuse her directly.

There was a new look in Celesta's face that suggested the effort and the danger of the last weeks had matured her.

"There is something preying on your mind that I do not understand," she said simply. "This is not a nice place, to be sure, but it must be hot everywhere now. And we're still free and together. I'm happier here than I was in the convent. Why are you always saying that you regret that dreadful place we took you from? Surely you cannot mean that!"

Roger looked at her, startled. So she was beginning to question his attitude, almost to criticise him! He had always reclined luxuriously on her admiration, and this gave him the feeling that his bed was being drawn from under him. She was beginning to think for herself; a detestable habit in a woman!

"You must overlook your dad's irritability!" he said with something of a return of his old manner. "It's true I have things on my mind. Almost drives me to distraction. As you know, I have a certain prop-

erty to look after, many business affairs. Even in prison I was able to keep in touch with my agents, to oversee things. But now, cut off from everybody as I am, every man's hand raised against me, I am helpless. My agents may very well have absconded with every penny I possess. What recourse has an outlaw?"

This was near enough to the truth for Roger to deliver it with heartfelt feeling. Celesta looked at him aghast.

"Surely, surely, no man could be so base!" she murmured.

"You don't know the possibilities of men's baseness!"

"We must talk it over," said Celesta agitatedly. "Surely some way can be found of communicating with your agents."

"I have thought until my brain is tired," he said.

"We must tell Hal. Maybe he—"

Roger audibly ground his teeth. "No!"

"You are unjust to Hal!"

"Maybe. But leave him out of this."

"Who are your agents, dad?"

"One of them you know. Miss Divart."

Celesta's gentle face hardened a little. Roger glanced at her sharply.

"She was not the principal," he said. "She merely did errands for me."

"Who was the principal? That man who came to see you—Mr. Chalmers?"

"No. It was—you've got to know it some time—it was Dexter Inchfawn!"

"The artist at Mrs. Blakemore's house!" said the surprised Celesta. "Why did you never tell me?"

Roger was never at a loss for an answer. "I was obliged to keep it secret. Naturally he didn't want it known that he was acting for a convict. You mustn't tell anybody."

"But how petty!" Celesta remarked. "And I liked him."

"Now you know what's preying on my mind," said Roger. "Everything I possess in the world is in Inchfawn's hands. Why, while we're living here in squalor, I'm a rich man, comparatively. And I have no hold on him—none! Suppose he converts it to his own use. It drives me wild!"

"You must have had reason to trust him," suggested Celesta.

"You cannot trust any man beyond a certain point."

"What a dreadful thought! Have you any idea where he is?"

"If he's honest he'll stay where he is until I have a chance to get in touch with him. But the house is watched by the police. Because your things are there. That much I have gathered from the newspapers. I am tied hand and foot!"

"I'll try to think of a way," said Celesta. "I wish you'd let me talk to Hal about it."

"No!"

As the biscuits were being drawn from the oven, an appetizing golden brown, Hal came in. He was wearing the rough clothes of a mechanic; he too had shaved his mustache; and he had donned a pair of heavy-rimmed glasses that had the effect of dimming the keenness of his glance and altered his whole expression. He laid them aside on entering. He looked pale and a little surly with fatigue.

Celesta, with a glance, saw that he had had no luck, and forebore to question him. The two men looked at each other like strange dogs. To do them credit, they generally succeeded in keeping the peace for Celesta's sake, but their glances were eloquent.

"Find anything?" asked Roger, just to be irritating.

"No," said Hal. "And I'm done looking. I've made the rounds of every machine shop and garage in town a dozen times, I guess. They laugh when they see me coming. There are about thirty stiff on the same round. I know them all now."

"How about trying something else?" Roger suggested with a sneer.

"Bench work is all I have any skill for," said Hal. "Except doctoring, which is out for the present. When you come to unskilled labor—Lord, the searchers run up into the hundreds! Men are offering themselves for a dollar and a half a day and finding no takers."

"What are we down to?" asked Roger.

"About seven dollars. I pawned my gun to-day."

"There is still my pin," said Celesta quickly.

Hal shook his head.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Roger disagreeably.

Hal flushed darkly. "Got any suggestions?" he asked.

"Supper's ready," Celesta interrupted.

Roger got off the bed. "I suppose I can take this rig off to eat in," he said bitterly. "I do like to sit down to my meals like a gentleman!"

He went into the adjoining room. The moment he was out of the way, Hal's whole aspect changed. He went close to Celesta; his hard, stubborn face became beautiful with tenderness.

"How have things been to-day?" he asked. "Pretty hot, eh?"

She looked at him openly and trustfully—too openly for him; he would have liked to see a faltering in her gaze—and said:

"Not so hot for me as for you, walking the streets."

"But you have to keep company with the hot stove."

"Never gave it a thought."

"I almost believe you're happy in this place."

"I am. I have so much to do."

"At first it nearly drove me wild, thinking of you in such a place," he said in a low voice and shaken with feeling. "You see, I expected to take better care of you than that. I still hate to see you here, but it's different now. You're so much finer than I thought. No, I don't mean that. That wouldn't be possible. I can't properly express what I mean. I mean, in addition to everything else, I'm beginning to think you're stronger than any of us. I'm beginning to lean on you, too!"

"That's the nicest thing you ever said to me," Celesta declared, red with pleasure.

Roger returned to the room, habited as a "gentleman."

To cover his emotion, Hal asked quickly: "What's for supper?"

"Beef *a la Provençale*," said Celesta.

"Gee whiz!"

"Oh, it's only beef stew, really," she confessed; "but that's what the sisters called it."

"Lucky for us you took cooking," said Roger.

They sat down to their meal.

By the time they had finished the most strident noises of the day were stilled. A faint stir of air came in through the windows at last. It was the hour of relaxation. Roger lit a cigarette, and Hal produced his pipe.

But their peace was presently broken by a resumption of the whining tinkle from the yard below.

Roger swore under his breath.

"The dago doesn't seem to have made some progress," said Hal. He rose. "Believe I'll go down and see if I can't help the poor wop."

"Now I suppose it'll keep up half the night," muttered Roger. "He goes out of his way to exasperate me."

Next day it appeared as if the tide had turned. Hal came home earlier than usual with a jubilant air.

"Got a job!" he cried. "Right out of the blue sky!"

"Oh, splendid!" Celesta exclaimed, beaming. "I knew you would! Tell us all about it."

"From a want ad," Hal said. "Lord knows I didn't expect anything from *that* source. But I cut 'em all out this morning and made my rounds as usual. This one sounded like nothing at all. 'Wanted, a male attendant for an invalid; one with some medical knowledge preferred.' I thought so little of it I left it for the last. It was a doctor on the South Side; a sort of shady-looking doctor, but gee, I can't be too particular!"

"Seems he's got a dope-fiend patient, and I'm to take care of him. You know—dole out his dope to him, and hold him down if he gets too obstreperous. Not exactly the job you'd pick in good times, but now it's like manna from Heaven! Twenty-five dollars a week! What do you know about that? Twenty-five a week! It begins tomorrow. I say we shall have a steak for supper on the strength of it."

They feasted that night. Even Roger had no excuse for ill temper, though he had somewhat the air of missing his grievance. Afterward they sat near the open window in the twilight. The harassed lines were

smoothed out of Hal's face. For the first time in many days he was not worrying about where next week's meals were coming from.

This night they had not even the piano-organ to fidget their nerves. They could see it under a shed in the yard. Celesta commented on it.

"We got it going last night," Hal said. "I suppose Tony has been out on his rounds all day. Business is bad for the dago, like the rest of us. He and his wife want to get to Montebello, where their folks live. He'd sell the grind-organ for their fare, if he could find a buyer."

They discussed their own plans for the future.

"We must save money," said Celesta with a wise air, "so we can move out of this place."

"And out of this damned town!" added Roger.

"We want a better place, of course," said Hal; "but I think we'd better stay here in Westmoreland as long as my job holds. It would have been better if we could have pushed right through to Montebello in the beginning, but now of course all my haunts and all my friends there are watched. A job is a job!"

"Perhaps we could find a little place in the suburbs," said Celesta.

In the midst of their talk there came a knock at the door. They glanced at one another in alarm. They had heard no one come upstairs. Few came to their door. That knock reminded them of how precarious their situation was after all.

Roger, who was not wearing his feminine dress, slipped into the inner room as noiselessly as a cat. Hal went to the door and opened it, keeping his hand on the handle.

An odd silence succeeded. Hal said nothing. Presumably there was somebody outside, but he said nothing either. Celesta could not see on account of the half-opened door. Her heart began to beat. She stood up. She heard Hal say in a strange, thick voice:

"You damned scoundrel!"

Joe Campas walked into the room, grinning. He was quite finely dressed in a bright blue suit and a shirt with a starched

pink collar; an expensive panama hat. He had a little package in his hand. His heavy, reddish face was wreathed in a malicious grin. Impossible to say whether the malice was intentional.

"Hello, folks," he said.

Celesta, with a little gasp, sat down again. She had no illusions about Campas now. Not after the cunning way in which he had cleared himself of all responsibility for Roger's escape, and fixed the blame on Hal. Celesta had a horror of him.

"You don't seem very well fixed here," said Campas, looking around. "Where's Roger? I heard him."

"Listening at doors seems to be your specialty," said Hal.

Campas only grinned.

Hal had closed the door and put his back against it. His head was lowered, his face dark with anger.

"You'd better get out of here before I hurt you," he muttered.

Campas gave him scowl for scowl.

"You'd better not try that on," he said threateningly.

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing I'd plug a hole through you," said Campas, tapping his hip pocket. "Afterward I'd put you in jail, all three of you! And take the reward."

Hal, with a groan of balked rage, walked toward the window.

Campas resumed his grin. "Nice kind of reception you give me! I got the old man out of jail, didn't I?"

"You'd better not say anything about *that*," muttered Hal. "Remember, we read the papers."

"Ah-h, you wouldn't expect me to take the blame on myself when you were safe out of the way," said Campas. "Be reasonable."

Hal was silent.

"Why don't you ask me how I found you?" Campas continued with his cunning, self-pleased grin. "I only been out five days. The police have been looking for you five weeks, and they ain't found you yet. I figured same as they did, that you'd made for Montebello. When they didn't catch you there, I figured you'd been held up somewhere. I just went around to the prin-

incipal towns between Clayton and Montebello and put want ads in the papers. Simple wasn't it? I believe in advertising for what you want."

Hal's face was tormented with bitterness. He had set such store by that job.

"I come in friendliness," Campas went on, his little eyes fixed greedily on Celesta. "Here you are, up against it, as anybody could see. Well, I'm well fixed. I got friends, I got money, I got a swell car down at the door. All you got to do is step in it, and shake this crummy joint."

"What then?" said Hal.

"Well, I got a friend who runs a swell sanatorium in Jamesburg," said Campas. "Roger and Celesta can live there till the bulls get tired looking for them. They'll have the best of everything. As for you, we'll find you a job—a real job this time. Most of my friends are medical men; we'll find you a practice somewhere."

"Not *your* kind of practice, by gad!" said Hal.

Campas's face turned blackish. "Cut out that kind of talk," he gritted. "You're not my boss now; I'm yours."

"We refuse your offer," said Hal shortly.

Celesta eagerly nodded her head.

Campas's face was ugly. "Not so fast," he snarled. "I come here in all friendliness, but things might as well be said plain. You've got no option in the matter. You've got to do what I say."

"I'll be damned!" Hal began hotly.

Roger came in quickly. "Wait a minute," he said.

"Why, hello, Roger," said Campas smoothly.

Roger winced at the familiarity, but it was no time to stick upon ceremony.

"There's no use getting in a quarrel," he said smoothly. "This has got to be talked over."

"There's a man with sense," Campas observed. "He don't butt his head against the facts of the situation."

"Roger can say what he likes," said Hal, "but I—"

Roger laid a hand on Hal's shoulder—a surprising act for him. But Roger's pinprick irritations against Hal had vanished for the time being. Roger realized that in

Campas he and Hal had a common enemy. For Hal and himself to quarrel in front of Campas would deliver them all into his hands. Hal realized this, too, and fell silent.

"Have you any objection to letting Hal and I talk this matter over to-night?" asked Roger.

Campas felt sure of his hand. He knew from Hal's anxiety to get the job that day that thy must be down to about their last dollar. Moreover, he believed that he had the easy-principled Roger on his side.

"All right," he agreed coolly. "Talk yourselves black in the face if you want. You can't escape the facts I've laid down."

Campas picked up his hat. He approached Celesta, grinning in what he intended to be an ingratiating way. "You look fine," he said. "Don't let them poison your mind against me. I'm not a bad sort of fellow. I stood by you once, and I'll stand by you again. Here, I brought you a little box of candy."

As Celesta made no move to take it, Campas laid it on the table. "See you in the morning," he said at the door.

As he went down the stairs Hal passionately snatched up the box of candy and flung it with all his might out of the window. It sailed over the fences into a distant yard.

"What did you do that for?" Roger demanded. "I suppose it was good candy."

Hal was speechless with rage.

"Hal did right, father," Celesta murmured.

There was silence in the little room. Hal struggled for self-control.

Roger said at last: "Well, it's damned unpleasant, but I really don't see what we can do but accept his offer. At least, we'll get out of this place. I'll soon be able to find myself, and get clear of him."

Hal laughed bitterly. "What do you think he's offering you? A little courteous hospitality? Once he gets you in his power do you think you'll ever get out again? That's childish!"

"Hal!" murmured Celesta admonishingly.

Hal clapped his hands to his head. "Oh, my God! It drives me mad to think of the

hole he has maneuvered us into!" he cried. "The damned scoundrel! That was the object of the whole plot. To get us into his power." Hal turned on Roger. "I suppose you know what his real incentive is?"

Of course Roger knew. "As long as I was with Celesta no harm could come to her," he said stiffly.

"How long would you last if you came between Campas and something he wanted?" cried Hal. "Strychnine in your coffee in the morning. Remember you're proposing to go live with them. They wouldn't even have to account for you, because you'd be there under cover. If you wanted to keep alive you'd have to starve yourself to death!"

Roger's ruddy face blanched. "But—but what's the alternative?" he stammered.

"We've got to beat it out of this place to-night."

"With four dollars between the three of us?"

Hal walked up and down. "Let me think! Let me think!" he muttered. "If that beast didn't make me so damned mad I could think more clearly—"

"Here's my pin," said Celesta. "The emerald is small, but—"

"Yes, give it to me!" said Hal with a look of relief. "The pawnshop is closed, but if the proprietor's at home he'll always make a deal."

He snatched up his hat and ran out.

Nearly an hour passed before Hal returned. He had his arms full of old clothes which he threw down.

"How much did you get on it?" Roger asked eagerly.

"Thirty-five; and I had to sell it."

Roger shrugged. "Cost me a hundred and fifty."

"The pawnbroker knew he had me."

"Where's the money?"

"Spent."

Roger's eyebrows went up.

"I bought the dago's piano-organ," said Hal.

"*Piano-organ!*" cried Roger. "For the love of Heaven—"

"Oh, don't let's waste time quarreling over it," said Hal. "It was the best thing that offered. It will provide us with a

disguise, and with a means of earning our living, too. With the piano, they threw in enough of their dago clothes to set out the three of us. I got walnut juice from the drug store. We've got to spend most of the night making each other up. At dawn we'll beat it."

"What good will make-up do us if the first time we open our mouths—"

"We'll have to keep 'em closed, then. We're going into the country where they're not familiar with dagoes."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STREET MUSICIANS.

AT evening, three days later, a weary, dark-skinned trio accompanied by a street piano, approached the outskirts of the city of Glassboro, sixty miles from Westmoreland. They looked discouraged. The country folk had enjoyed their music well enough; food and lodging had been freely forthcoming; but it had not occurred to the farmers that cash contributions were called for, and the musicians were not experienced enough to know how to suggest it.

So they arrived in Glassboro no richer than they had set out from Westmoreland. They found a miserable lodging with a family too closely occupied with the struggle to make ends meet to betray much curiosity about their guests.

Glassboro was a busy manufacturing place, not so large as Westmoreland. All along the road the musicians had been telling themselves they would do better in a town. In town, they had agreed, it would be safer for Celesta and Roger to remain under cover while Hal perambulated with the piano. Hal had been sedulously practicing an Italo-American jargon en route.

He set off in the morning full of hope. He made quite an effective young Neapolitan, with his eyes dancing, and his teeth gleaming in his swarthy face. The battered felt hat, and the quaintly cut jacket, while a trifle small for him, were full of character.

At nightfall he returned weary and discouraged. A miserable handful of copper coins was all he had to show. Eighty-three cents for a day's work!

Celesta essayed the rôle of comforter. "You can't expect to succeed the first day. It will take you a while to learn the best neighborhoods."

"I've already learned that the best neighborhoods are the worst," Hal observed bitterly. "The rich order you away. It's only from the poor that the poor can expect anything."

The next two days told a similar tale. Hal never took in as much as a dollar. It became increasingly clear that the street piano would never support them. They had no means of paying for their poor lodging, and their hosts became suspicious.

On the fourth morning Celesta appeared from her room once more an enchanting little daughter of Italy. She wore a dress of dark green cotton, very full in the skirt, and with a close-fitting bodice. A bright-colored scarf was crossed on her breast, a smaller scarf coquettishly arranged on her dark hair. Her face was stained, not so dark as Hal's, but merely to a rich cream color. Her hair was waved and done low over her ears.

"I need a tambourine," she said, half laughing, half afraid, "but you can get me that when we take in some money."

"What's the idea?" stammered Roger.

"I'm going with Hal."

"I won't allow it!"

"No!" cried Hal, agreeing with Roger for once.

There appeared in Celesta's face a look of soft obstinacy with which they were not unacquainted.

"I'm going," she announced softly. "It's useless to talk. A street piano man always has a girl with him. She holds out the tambourine for the money. All along the road I held back too much. Now I'm going to do my part."

Both Roger and Hal started to argue. Celesta merely smiled and moved toward the door.

Roger caught her arm. "I won't have it!" he cried. "A daughter of mine begging for pennies in the street! I've stood for a lot, but this is too much! You shan't go!"

"Go on downstairs and wait for me," Celesta said to Hal. "I'll join you directly."

And in three minutes she did.

Hal did not welcome her overwarmly. "What did you say to him that made him change his mind so quickly?" he asked.

"I'll tell you later," Celesta replied with her adorable half-terrified, half-roguish smile.

"I may not be so easy to change," Hal said, scowling. "You can't do a thing like this."

Celesta picked up the strap attached to the piano on wheels. "Come on," she said, "or I'll pull it out all by myself."

They returned about five o'clock that afternoon in the highest spirits. Hal had not been able to stand out against her, of course. A new Celesta had appeared, who enraptured him all over from the beginning.

Her disguise provided cover for her shyness, and a tricky spirit peeped out of her eyes. Hal turned the crank and watched her with his beaming smile. It is probable that his open infatuation was good for business. Certainly they made an engaging pair. The most unlikely sort of people stopped to look and smile, and small change poured in.

When they came in Celesta flung an arm around the disgruntled Roger's neck, and gayly rattled her tambourine. Hal poured a whole cascade of coppers on the table, with a good sprinkling of silver, even a quarter or two.

"Look! Look!" cried Celesta, calling attention to the marvel. "And we bought a tambourine, and brought home the supper out of it, too!"

"Just short of three dollars," announced Hal.

Celesta gave a history of their day: "Oh, what fun! Wandering the streets in disguise. Able to look at anybody without their being able to see you, the real you, I mean. I was terrified at first, but it turned out to be just fun! Because you felt like somebody else, you see. I wanted to laugh every time I looked at Hal turning the crank and grinning at me like an Italian Cheshire cat!"

"I haven't any idea how to play the tambourine, but I just rattled it and banged it in time to the music, and they seemed to be satisfied. I just smiled and smiled and everybody smiled back so jolly and friendly."

Everybody was so friendly. They seemed to like me. Often they tried to talk to me, but I shook my head and went on smiling.

"I must practice how to play the tambourine properly. There's a certain way of rubbing it with your thumb. Sometimes they spin it on one finger, but I guess that's pretty hard.

"There was a darling old man who followed us from place to place until all his small change gave out. I hope he could afford it. He was perfectly deaf, and nodded his head all out of time with the music. He said: 'I can't hear it, my child, but your face is music to my eyes!' Wasn't that sweet? But I had to make out I didn't understand.

"And the children! They were the ones who really brought in the money. Accompanied us through street after street, until I was sure they would never find their way home. And every time Hal played they started to dance with such a comical grown-up air. One tune was all the same as another to them. They danced exactly the same dance to the 'Miserere' as to 'Ain't We Got Fun!'

"Oh! And once we almost got into a scrape. What do you think! A really-truly Italian rushed up and began to jabber at us! Imagine! I was absolutely up a tree. Didn't know which way to look. But Hal started to jabber to me in some outlandish lingo, and I jabbered back, and so the Italian thought we were some other kind of foreigner, and walked away disappointed. It was a pretty good compliment to our disguise, wasn't it?"

The following days showed no falling-off in their prosperity. With added touches here and there, they continually improved their disguises, and with each successful day they gained more assurance. Their little cash reserve that Hal guarded so jealously ceased to shrink, then began to swell little by little. Hal cast his qualms to the winds and gave himself up to the delights of being with Celesta all day long, without the irritating presence of her father.

One day as they were pulling the piano home, Hal in the shafts, Celesta walking beside him, tugging at the strap, she said, appropos of nothing that had gone before:

"I'm ready to tell you now what it was I said to dad that persuaded him to let me come with you the first day. I have his permission to tell you."

"Yes?" Hal prompted with the hard look that was apt to appear in his face when Roger was mentioned.

Celesta protested against that look. "You are unjust to dad. It is because he has a great anxiety on his mind that he is sometimes irritable and unreasonable."

"I tell myself that," said Hal, trying to be fair.

"But you don't know it all," Celesta went on. "Father was pretty well off when he—when they put him in that place. He was obliged to put all his property in the hands of a man. And he has no hold over this man now. It's the fact that he can't communicate with him that drives poor dad nearly wild with anxiety."

"I see. But what has that got to do with the old street piano?"

"I'm coming to that. I didn't intend to suggest it to you until I was sure we could make a success of this business. We have made a success of it, haven't we? We've got a good disguise. Nobody in the streets has ever suspected we were anything but what we seem to be."

"Why, no. What of it?"

"The man I speak of is Mr. Inchfawn. He lives, or was living, in the same boarding house in Clayton where I stopped."

"Yes?" Hal said, still not catching her drift.

"Couldn't we take our piano to Clayton now and play in the streets there? Play in front of Mrs. Blakemore's house. And find out if Mr. Inchfawn is still there. And get in touch with him?"

"I don't see why we couldn't," Hal agreed, grinning. "Certainly Campas would never look for us in Clayton."

These hard-pressed fugitives had two sets of pursuers to baffle; Campas and his gang, and the police. Of the two they dreaded Campas more. Returning to Clayton was not altogether a foolhardy act, for it would almost certainly throw Campas off the track; but as far as the police were concerned, it was like sticking their heads in

the lion's mouth. They gave a whole week to their preparations.

The escape of Roger Manion had ceased to be news, but it had been taken as a personal affront by the prison authorities, and the three had reason to believe that the search for them was still being pursued on the quiet. The authorities had been chiefly aroused against Hal, the "recreant doctor" as the newspapers had called him. Apparently they had never come upon any real clew to their whereabouts, but it was possible they might have information which had never been divulged.

Hal and Roger had studied every line in the newspapers, but Celesta had soon ceased to read them, because they only angered and distressed her. Photographs of Roger had been widely published, and many details of his career related. No photograph of Hal nor of Celesta had been procurable by the newspapers.

Hal and Celesta still studied to improve their disguises. Hal's Italo-American patois would now deceive almost anybody but an Italian. Celesta darkened her skin more; learned a more characteristic way of doing her hair. Wonders of disguise may be accomplished with a woman's hair. Hal procured a pair of curiously wrought gold pendants for her ears that changed the whole look of her. She became expert with the tambourine.

There was Roger to be thought of, too. Since he had proved to be incapable of maintaining an Italian character except among those who did not know Italian, a new disguise had to be found. It was finally decided he must play the part of a surly old codger who had given up all care of his personal appearance. This was a bitter pill for him to swallow, but he had to acknowledge the ingenuity of the idea.

His hair had grown somewhat untidy during the last few weeks. They now forced him to cultivate a disfiguring grayish, sandy stubble on his chin and upper lip. For several days before they started they would not allow him to brush his hair. Hal brought home garments from a hand-me-down shop that caused him to shudder, but he put them on. Finally Hal grimed his face and hands in realistic fashion.

"Who would ever recognize Gentleman Roger now?" Hal asked wickedly.

Roger groaned at the sight of himself in the mirror.

Finally they set off one morning on the earliest train. Roger rode in one car, Celesta and Hal in another. The street piano traveled in the baggage car. According to their arrangements, Hal and Celesta were to get off at the first mill town and play their way in, while Roger was to ride into the terminal, and spend the day looking for rooms and furnishing them. They dared not risk a lodging house, however humble.

Hal and Celesta alighted at the town of McCrea's Mills. The battered piano was lowered from the baggage car, and they immediately set to work. They could have done well in the squalid mill towns; the poor people welcomed Celesta's bright costume and the jingling tunes, but they were in a hurry; they had twelve miles to cover. They stopped only often enough to keep up their character. They followed the same main street that they had traveled in their automobile that wild night a month before.

The afternoon was drawing to a close as they approached the center of Clayton. Here they met their first misadventure. They were to meet Roger at five thirty on a certain corner, and having still a few minutes to spare they had slowed down, playing oftener. They were in a street of busy shops of the humbler sort, and business was good. A small group loitered on the sidewalk smiling in half friendly, half sheepish fashion. Hal turned the handle vigorously, while Celesta twirled her tambourine.

A policeman came sauntering along. He was a corpulent policeman, but of the type that fat renders irascible instead of easy-going. His little swimming eyes glittered with malice. He walked all around the piano before he spoke.

"Where's your license?" barked the officer.

The music stopped, and the expressions of the listeners changed. Celesta received a painful lesson in the vagaries of human nature. Those who had been regarding them in so friendly a fashion immediately took the part of the policeman. Apparently it was more fun to see the guineas pinched

than to hear them play. Wops were fair game, anyhow.

Meanwhile Hal shrugged expressively and spread out his hands.

"I notta know 'bout da license," he said.

A surprising torrent of abuse was launched on their heads. Celesta was bewildered. A dark flush rose under the walnut stain on Hal's cheeks, and he was hard put to it to keep back a hot rejoinder in good Anglo-Saxon. Only the imploring touch of Celesta's fingers on his arm restrained him.

"You damn dago! Think you can come over here and do what you like, don't yeh? I'll teach you respect for the law! We don't want you over here, anyhow. Didn't know you hadda have a license! G'wan! You wasn't born yestiddy! Why don't you do a man's work?"

Hal finally managed to make himself heard. "I jussa come here."

"Where d'ja come from?"

"Glassboro."

"Didn't you have to have a license there?"

"No, sir."

"You lie!"

"Where I get da license, please?"

"City Hall's closed for the day, and you know it!"

"I playa no more to-day. To-morrow I getta da license."

The officer laughed. "Think you can get by with that? You come along with me."

Hal's heart contracted. "Alla right! Alla right!" he said propitiatingly. "You letta her go. I playa da mus'. She don' do nottin'."

"She took the money in. I seen her. You come along, too, sister."

They set off down the street. Hal tasted despair. Celesta trudged beside him, pulling at her strap and keeping her head down. An ever increasing crowd followed, pushing ahead to get a look back at them, staring, staring, like imbeciles.

Hal burned with an intolerable humiliation, not for himself, but for her. He foresaw worse to come. How could they maintain their assumed characters throughout police court proceedings? There would be an interpreter in the court room.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

U U U U

LITTLE MISS APRIL

MISS APRIL comes a-laughing,
A-dancing through the town,
Gayly trimmed with icicles
Her filmy-green-lace gown.

She coaxes in the forest,
She whispers in the lane,
And all the greening leaf-buds
Are whispering back again.

She paints them all with sunshine,
She powders them with snow,
And then she falls a-laughing,
A mocking "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Oh, merry is her laughter,
And wondrous sweet to see—
If this be mocking laughter,
Then give me mockery!

Charlotte W. Thurston.



Pride and Poll

By BEATRICE A. VANDEGRIFT

IF I was the good Lord sitting up in them clouds and viewing us humans and our doings, seeing just why this was so and that was so, and understanding things us folks down here is too dumb to savvy, the first little stunt I'd pull off for the benefit of mortal critters would be doing away with this here pride stuff. It accounts for about half the misery in the world, to Bill Geers's way of thinking, and I guess I ought to know. About two years was hacked out of my life through nothing else than that blamed feeling, pride.

I guess I'll spill you the whole story of how it all come about, not that it'll do any good—because no amount of preaching can help in a case like that—but in hopes you'll know what an overgrown idiot I was. So when you laugh at this story and say, "The darned fool!" I'll take it in humble spirit like the loony old Hindoos that thrashed themselves sore, calling it "doing penance" and "mortifying the flesh."

It was this way.

I ambled into a big department store one night, about a week before Christmas, plowing my way to the handkerchief place to see if I could cop a couple for my landlady, when a piano in the back of the shop started up one of them jazz songs.

"Huh," I was saying to myself. "It ain't nothing more or less than a revival of this here bushman music they played out in Sumatra when I was selling can openers there eight years ago."

Plink-tin-plunk and tinkle, slithered the piano, and there come to me of a sudden the memory of a blazing hot night out there in a joint at Padang where I and a few dozen gobs was raising old Harry while the booze was oozing pretty. They was playing that same tune and I was dancing around like an Apache with a brass-skinned baby in pink and orange Mother Hubbard. I remember she had a mouth on her like a sunset and a cute little way of twisting in my arms like a wet seal.

Yelping hyenas—but that music wailed!

And here they was playing the same tune eight year later in little old Noo Yawk.

Well, I picked out a couple hanks from the general débris and begin to shove my way out when they struck up the same piece again, not so rough as the last time, and a girl's voice started singing.

I couldn't see the girl, but she sounded like a calm, cool brook bubbling over the pebbles and it made me almost wish I'd been good enough to get to Heaven, for I'd bet my last peso she'd be in the front row of the Angel Chorus.

Well, it was getting late and I knew Ma Ferguson's hash would be dripping icicles by the time I got back to the boarding house, but still—something made me wish I could see the face that was spouting those tinny old pieces and making them sound like paradise. So I jammed through the bargain-delvers and finally emerged at the back of the store.

And there she was.

Just a kid, no more than eighteen, I guess, and as pale as the chicken soup Ma Ferguson ladles out to us Sundays. But she was pretty, with the kind of prettiness that doesn't bust on you all of a flash, but that comes gradual, the more you stare at her.

She stopped singing and I leaned over the piano and said, "Hello, kid!"

She looked up at me with them big deer-brown eyes and I had an idea I shouldn't have called her "kid."

"What's the name of the piece you was singing?" I asked, taking my elbow off the piano and standing up straight.

"Bombay Blues," she returned polite.

"It's kinda pretty," I remarked.

She turned her back to fish out a sheet of music for a woozy-looking guy with a green shirt, and I saw a couple little brown curls at the back of her neck that was too blamed cute.

"Say, do you know you're all right?" I said when she looked around again.

Her eyes got very big and a little sad, and she didn't answer.

"I heard that same tune out in Sumatra eight years ago," I begin. "New York is a slow burg when it comes to picking up the jazz stuff."

"Yes?" she said, and commenced to hunt for another sheet of music.

"Don't see why they call the blamed thing 'Bombay Blues' when it come from Sumatra," I observed, thinking this girl was a whizz of a hard one to get on with. It's pretty rare the dames turn me down and I ain't used to it.

"Do you want to buy a copy?" she asked.

"Maybe—if you sing it again and I like it."

"You heard me sing it once."

"Sure, I heard you. It sounded like Heav—it sounded pretty good."

A tall, sour-looking gink that I had a hunch was the floorwalker come strolling in our direction and the kid sat down at the piano again.

So I started to move off. "So long," I said.

She didn't answer, but I thought I saw a glimmer of a smile on her mouth.

"Nice child," I decided.

That night I skipped out to a little poker game with the boys, assembling some forty bucks, and next day I raked down twenty commish on cigarette cases, so I was feeling pretty comfortable, thank you.

Ma Ferguson dished up a real lemon meringue pie that evening, and up in my room after supper I got out the hankies I'd bought for her Christmas and said to myself, "Bill Geers, you old piker! The idea of wishing a couple cheap cotton mooswars on your good looking landlady! You'd better hike yourself right back and change 'em."

So I L'd down to the store and bought a dozen real lace ones. Then I started to walk out when I got to thinking that maybe Ma Ferguson's young tike what's taking piano lessons might like some of them new jazz pieces. I ambled over to the music department.

The kid was there again.

"Hello," I said careless.

"Hello," she come back at me, with a smile.

Seeing she was willing to be friendly I parked a while and we talked real chummy. I found out she was staying with another jane in a room on the top floor of a joint I

guess was pretty cheap, and that she didn't have no folks living.

I bought a couple pieces of music and then sprung this little idea:

"Say, ki—miss," I whispered, so the blamed oily floorwalker couldn't listen in. "You gotta get some roses in them cheeks. Let's trolley out Westchester way Sunday and absorb a little fresh air."

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said, twisting the blue ribbons that hung down from her collar. I liked that collar because it made her neck look nice.

"Why not?" I argued.

"I don't know you."

"Well, this is your rare opportunity."

"I don't care. I can't go."

"Aw, come on, girlie," I inveigled. "We'll hop off and heave snowballs at each other, slide down a big icy hill I know, hike back to the trolley station and tank up with a piping hot chocolate. Aw, come on."

She didn't answer, and I knew I'd won as I most always does.

"Can Annie come, too?" she asked, after quite a spell.

"Who's Annie?"

"She's the girl I stay with."

"Sure. Bring Annie along. What's the number of your place? I'll be around at two sharp. Bundle up warm."

"I will," she said, smiling quiet-like.

II.

So we trolleyed out that Sunday to the Westchester woods with the snow lying soft all over 'em and the brown fence rails with their white topping looking like a fudge layer cake spread with marshmallow.

We had a good time, romping gay as a school of young porpoises.

I didn't take much stock in this dame Annie, though. She was too flashy, togged out in a slick little turban, seal hug-me-tight and crazy high-heeled pumps. All she did was giggle and stand off, being afraid of getting a snowball in her face and spoiling the work of art.

The next Sunday, though, she stayed home, and Poll—that was the kid's name—was finally persuaded to hike out with me alone.

It rained like the old Harry coming back, so we packed into a taxi. Of course, I kissed Poll, as I always does bringing girls home, if the fare totals up over a dollar. She didn't say nothing.

When I got back to Ma Ferguson's that night the fact that Poll didn't pull no kick made me sort of mad. I thought she was a little different from the rest, but I guess they're all the same. However, she was a nice kid, so I trotted her out to shows and things real often.

One snappy Sunday we took a big walk up the river and sat on a stony little hook jutting out in the water. Things was calm and nice, the Jersey shore looking like a downy white dress I seen a skating girl in the Follies wearing once.

Poll and I sat against a log, me holding her hand and her parking her head on my shoulder. There was a little spot of color on each of her cheeks and she looked real pretty, so I kissed her again.

"Why do you do that, Bill?" she asked me sudden, being the first comment she'd made about it.

"Why?" I teased. "Because you're a cute kid and I like to do it."

"Yes?" she said slow. "But I don't want you to do it no more, Bill."

"Why not?" I yelped, sort of mad. "You never made no kick about it before. I guess plenty of fellows has kissed you without you making a kick. Not that that keeps you from being a great little girl."

"No, nobody kissed me before, Bill."

"Ha, ha," I snickered. "Tell me another."

There was a funny look in them big brown eyes. "I was scared from the first day you—did it that you would think I was just—like all of them," she said slow, measuring every word. "I knew you'd get the idea I let—other people do it. But I don't, Bill."

"No?" I returned, a little bored at Poll's pulling this serious stuff. "Why do you let me do it then, hon?"

"Because I—love you."

Can you tie that?

Well, I kissed her some more and said, "Sure, sweet, I love you, too. That makes it even, don't it?"

"Yes," she sighed and snuggled her head down on my shoulder.

That night, after seeing her home, I could have kicked myself three ways. What a doggoned old hypocrite I was!

III.

A COUPLE weeks skidded by, me steering Poll home every night from the store, her laughing and happy, while I sulked and tried not to let on how things stood. It made me feel like a low-down skunk the way she'd take my arm with that cute little scared squeeze when we was crossing a bad street. I'm telling you this so you can help me call myself names.

Then I got the idea I'd better go off for a spell and maybe she'd get over it. So I told her I was skipping out to Chicago to sell a big company these trick cigarette cases, and didn't know when I'd be back.

Five weeks paraded by like a funeral march, but finally I poked around to the store.

She wasn't there. A new dame with stringy yellow hair was yelping out the jazz tunes and making the place a den of torment.

"Hey, sister!" I saluted. "Where's the other girl that works here?"

"Oh," she warbled, fluffing out her hair and slumping on one hip, "you wanna know where the other sugar baby blowed to? What's the matter with *me*, kid?"

"Nothing, I hope," I come back at her. "Where is she?"

"That cute little parsnip with the brown bob?"

"Ye-ah, where is she? Huh?"

"Whaddyuh wanna know fer?"

"I'm her friend."

"Gee, some girls get all the luck. Well, I hate to say it, but your cute little playmate's punched the big time clock."

"I don't get you. Come on now, sister, no kidding," I said, getting madder by the minute.

"Well, she got run over, that's all. Awful, ain't it?"

"Run over?" I gulped. "Killed?"

"Ye-ah. Ain't it awful how folks can't walk on the street without them taxis—"

I beat it out on the run.

"Poll is dead. Poll is dead," buzzed over and over in my ears. "Just beginning to get some little posies in them cheeks of hers, too. And now a blamed taxi has to iron 'em all out."

It's a wonder I didn't get flattened out myself, tearing through traffic like a crazy man. Finally I come to Poll's boarding house.

"I must see Annie," I thought, "and have her tell me—"

For a minute I stood outside the door. A queer, warm feeling come over me sudden and I knew then I loved the kid.

I knocked. Somebody rattled the bolt and come out.

It was Poll.

I don't know what I done. She must have thought I was a loon. All I know is her fingers kept stroking my hair and her heart was thumping close against my ear.

"Bill!" she cried over and over. "What's the matter, Bill?" But I only hugged her tighter.

After a spell I shifted to low gear and she told me it was another girl that had got run over and that she had left the store for a dandy place, nice, refined and all, where the hours was much shorter.

That night I took her down to a hunky little chop house on Twenty-third Street and she promised that she'd hook up with me for better or worse when I could scrape in a bit more cash.

I said, too, that I was going to have her take music lessons, and some day soon she would make these opera birds hike back to the hick towns where they come from. I also hinted she'd better give up rooming with this dame Annie, now that she was pulling down bigger pay and could afford it.

Time trickled by—things running pretty smooth, all in all. But somehow I couldn't unload enough of them cigarette cases to furnish a flat decent and get a coon to chase the dust while Poll chased the keys.

The ninth of May come round again—the day when I pulled the wilt thou—and we figured on having a little anniversary, going down to the same eating joint and doing the scene over again.

We sure had the rehearsing down fine,

Then that afternoon, who should blow in but Sam Gintz, a pal of the old days when we was kids, swimming Hell Gate and raising general devilment on our block. I hadn't laid eyes on him since and we sure shook the glad fist.

Said he was hitting it back for Iowa in the morning and wanted me to go pardners with him. I told him nix.

"Why not, bud?" he growled like he always did when somebody crossed him. "I got a bird of a scheme. Noiseless dumb-waiters. All you gotta do is jolly a bunch of rich old dames into taking over a little stock. That oughta be as easy as selling smoke screens in Pittsburgh for a good-looking guy like you, Bill."

I admitted it ought to, but I still held out.

"Blame it, what's the matter with you, you brass-lined old bull-slinger?" he roared in fond tenderness.

To show him what the matter was I doped out the cute little idea of having him horn in on me and Poll's anniversary blow-out. So I give her a ring.

"Listen, sweet," I began. "I'm dragging my old side-kick, Sam Gintz, what I was telling you about, to our little supper to-night. Get hold of friend Annie, will you, and us four 'll breeze down Broadway to one of them swell feed palaces."

Poll's voice sounded kinda faint and far away.

"Oh, then we're not going down to the little place where we—"

"Naw, hon. I wouldn't take Sam to no cheap joint like that."

"And won't we celebrate our—our being engaged—just you and me alone, Bill?"

"Gosh, kitten, I gotta pay *some* attention to my friends, ain't I, when they only come to the home burg for a couple days? Climb into your nice little blue dress, cuteness, and me and you and Annie and Sam 'll *all* celebrate the happy day."

Poll suddenly got enthusiastic.

"Sure, Bill, that will be just great! I'm crazy to meet this Mr. Gintz."

"Ye-ah?" I said.

"Um—hum! If he's your friend, Bill, he must be an *awful* nice man."

"Ye-ah, he's all right," I admitted, will-

ing to give Gintz a boost for old times' sake, yet thinking private he ain't as much as he tells me he is. Not that I'm in the habit of slugging my friends.

So Sam and I ambled around for the girls that night and I near keeled over when I laid my lights on Poll. Annie always was a flashy dresser, but Poll never went in for the joy rags and it riled me to see her tizzled up in that snaky red dress with the paint shining on her face like a Dutch doll's.

And when I said: "Shake hands with Mr. Gintz, Poll," she giggled silly. "Oh, I'm *so* pleased to meet you, Mr. Gintz! Bill has been telling me some of the *wonderful* things you used to do!"

We all packed into a taxi, Sam sitting across from Poll, and the way they ogled each other would make you sick. I didn't know what was eating her. Here I invite my old friend to look over the nice little girl I'd picked for the wife and she turns out to be a painted, wild Injun.

Getting out of the yellow bus, Sam helped her down, and she said: "Oh, Mr. Gintz," simpering like when he took her arm.

All through dinner she feasted on Sam's monologue about himself, looking over at me once in a while and asking: "What was you saying, Bill *dear*?" with a little laugh in her voice as if she was poking fun at me.

It was enough to make any man sore. Then she and Sam got up to dance, and I near rose out of my seat to see the snaky way she was twisting in his arms. Of a sudden there come back the picture of that girl out at Sumatra and how she writhed like a wet seal.

And to think my Poll could do it!

All right, if she wanted to make a fool of herself, let her. She couldn't make one out of me. So I hitched over a little nearer this dame Annie and strung her along in good shape. She fell for it, too. Not that I'm any Valentino with the ladies, but I ain't no Will Rogers either.

Poll's eyes sure was popping when she come back to the table with Sam and seen me petting Annie's paw. I guess that showed her I wouldn't stand for nonsense.

The evening dwindled, Poll and Sam acting up worse and worse and me and Annie trying to raise the limit.

I took Poll home, though, her never yapping once till we got to the front steps. Then she turned around and said: "Bill," from the bottom of the big fur choker she had on.

But I wasn't to be soothed that easy. "Poll," I come back, severe, "what made you carry on that way with Sam? I'm ashamed of you, acting so."

Her eyes was big and brown. I never seen 'em so big since the day she said she loved me up by the river.

"You acted—that way with Annie, too," she returned, chokey.

"Ye-ah, but you started first with Sam," I said, hot-tongued. "What's the idea?"

"I don't know," she whispered, and I could see, even in the watery light from the hall, that she was near crying. "I—we had planned such a nice little time all by ourselves—you bringing somebody else—not going to our own little place where we—we said we would get married some *day*—inviting them other two on—on the *9th* of May." She was sure enough crying now.

But I didn't get the drift.

"Gosh, and you made a Hottentot out of yourself just for that! Some women are the craziest—What do you suppose Sam thinks of you?"

"He—he seemed to like me pretty well."

"Ye-ah, he did, did he? Just because he pranced around with you like a wild galoot and hee-hawed at some of the silly stuff you pulled ain't no reason he liked you," I yelped, getting madder and madder, as I had a right to be. "What do you suppose he's saying of *me* now? Like as not laughing at the monkey I've made out of myself tumbling for a jazzy jane like you. And after me soaping him about what a nice sweet little kid you was. 'So that's the kind of a Sheba Bill has picked for the missus,' he's saying."

"All right, then. If he don't like it you can tell him I'm not going to be your missus."

"I will," I snapped back.

We stood there a minute not saying nothing. Then Poll made a funny little noise in her throat and snuggled her head down on my shoulder. "Bill! Bill!" she cried, and something else I couldn't hear.

"Are you sorry, hon, for cutting up like that?" I asked, willing to make up and even patting her hair.

"Are you sorry, too?" she whispered soft.

"I asked you," I said, getting riled up again. "You started it first."

"But you made me do it," she argued, lifting her head off my shoulder and standing back.

"How?"

"Inviting them other two."

"Well, I had to be decent to Sam, didn't I? Going back West in the morning and all."

"Yes, but it's just—" and she stopped.

"Ye-ah, just because you wanted to make a fool of me in front of Sam," I said.

"I'm sorry, Bill. I won't make no fool of you again."

"I'll say not," I told her.

She slipped something into my fist. It was the little pearl ring I give her. "Good-by," she said.

"All right, then!" I snapped, cold as a steam-heated flat, and walked off.

Next morning I almost called her up, but a man's got to have a little pride, and if she wanted to make up she knew my number.

That afternoon I skipped West with Sam.

IV.

A COUPLE months limped on, while I bumped around, picking up a little coin and lots of experience. But I couldn't get over thinking about Poll. Every once in so often I started to write, but then, I thought, like as not she's married by now. Once or twice, though, the idea popped up that maybe she was sick or out of work or something, and I come near hiking it back—but didn't.

Every night, even when I was stewed as an oyster, I thought of them big brown eyes and the cute way she used to muss up my hair. And so the thing went—my mind fattening on the idea I hadn't lowered my blamed pride, and my heart starving for the loving I'd lost.

Then, one day in Des Moines, I blew into a little cigar store where a man asked me did I want to listen in on his radio concert, all the way from Newark. "Sure," I said, hankering for a sound from home.

So he connected up, and strike me dead if the first thing I didn't hear was Poll's voice, the same voice that used to sing them tinny old Woolworth pieces and make them sound like heaven.

Well, there's some things only the poets can find the words to talk about—and I ain't no Shelley—but I'm telling you it—got me.

That night I decided to pack a couple of shirts and a dozen new neckties and blow for home.

She wasn't at the same place she used to stay, so I looked up this dame Annie.

"Where's Poll?" I asked.

"Gee, Bill!" she drawled. "When did you romp in? Say, you look great after all these years. Bet you've made a pile of cush. Set down and I'll look up a cup of tea, kid."

"Where's Poll?" I insisted.

"Ain't seen her for a bow-wow's age. Guess she's singing for some radio people or something—giving concerts. I dunno just what. Say, kid, remember the night we toddled into that restaurant and—"

"Ye-ah, Annie, sure. I remember.

Where's them radio people you was talking about?"

"Oh, down to Newark. Wait, I got Poll's telephone number somewheres around. She's staying in New York. Said for me to call her up if I wanted a job."

I grabbed the number and beat it.

"So-long, Bill!" called Annie, pleasant, out of the second-story window. "Drop in again some time."

"Sure, sure!" I yelled back and run down the street like a couple policemen after a rum-runner.

Poll's hangout was a swell one, all right—palm trees in front, marble hall, elevator and everything. I begin to think that maybe I better not see her after all.

But the coon boy said she was in and to come up, so I had to go. The door opened and there was Poll, her eyes still big and brown.

I come in and we didn't say nothing.

"Poll," I sputtered finally, "would you like to marry a darn fool?"

"No," she returned. "I would like to marry *you*, Bill."

Can you beat it?



UPON GRADUATING

SOME day, when I have ceased to hear
The scarlet songs my pulses sing,
Forgotten dreams, turned stone to fear
And found my flesh a stoic thing,

Perhaps I'll know—that have not known—
Why laughter lurks beyond the stars;
What preludes on west winds are blown
From pole to pole; and why the bars

Of summer moonlight urgent lie
Across the green breast of the grass;
And to what purpose men must die,
As furtive shadows pause, and pass.

I'll sit, remotely, in the sun,
And read these answers in the air,
And yet—when all is said and done,
When once I know, I shall not care.

Faith Baldwin Cuthrell.



A Boob There Was

By C. C. WADDELL

Author of "So This Is Arizona!" etc.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BUSY BOOTLEGGER.

VAN CARPEN and J. P. were adepts at trimming their sails to the wind; but, weatherwise as they were, they found it no easy task on their arrival at Guadalajara City to decide exactly how the wind was blowing.

In the first place, it was almost impossible to find out from the varying stories one heard just what had happened.

Faith Howland had been murdered. No, that was wrong—she had not been murdered, but abducted by a gang of bandits. Bob Moore had confessed to the crime and been arrested. No, that was wrong—he had merely given himself up in order to aid the recovery of the girl, and was not even locked up.

In the hotchpotch of rumors and counter-rumors, truths and half-truths, with which the town seethed, to get at the actual facts was like hunting for a needle in a haystack.

Naturally public sentiment was a trifle mixed.

There was one faction, composed chiefly of excitement seekers, who were hotly demanding that Moore be lynched without delay, and that the sheriff be strung up along with him as a fitting rebuke for his mush-and-milk attitude. It was noticeable, however, that these ceased their belligerent frothings and became strangely silent whenever the decried official hove in sight. Then there was another crowd, made up of the more responsible element, which frowned upon any suggestion of violence.

But between these two extremes were minor groups, representing almost every shade of varying opinion. The great mass of citizens were in that state of indecision where they might easily be swayed in either direction by the slightest event.

Van Carpen was rather inclined to side in with the lynching gang, chiefly because he believed that if they once got started they would string up Northrup along with Bob and the sheriff.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 24.

But J. P., more politic and far-seeing, entered a decisive veto. You never could tell, he said, where a mob would stop; and if the idea of exterminating all Moore's friends became popular, who knew but that they themselves might be added to the casualty list?

His advice was to emulate B'rer Rabbit for the time being, and "jes' lay low an' say nuffin'."

"Well, for the time being," Van Carpen finally yielded, "and until we see how things are going to work out. But don't expect me to be in any hurry about pulling my rescue stunt. Let Moore and Northrup sail around until the town gets thoroughly convinced that they are four-flushing, and turns on 'em. Then, with the decks cleared, it 'll be my chance to step into the spotlight."

The news that Bob and Northrup were about to take to the air in a search for some clew to the missing girl aroused only derision on his part. As he pointed out to J. P., what more could they discover now than when they had both been within fifty yards of her that afternoon?

Again, the agonizing plight of poor Faith, the natural terrors and apprehensions of her situation, failed to stir either of the conscienceless pair to any sentiment of pity. Their only consideration in the affair was their own convenience.

By the time that they had managed to sift out from the conflicting stories afloat something approximating the truth, and had settled their line of action, it was almost the hour of moonrise, and word came that the aviators were about to take off.

Chary of another meeting with Northrup, Van Carpen did not join the crowd which was straggling down toward the railroad station to see the start, but left it to his partner to bring back a report of what might occur.

The latter, when he reached the big field on the other side of the tracks, found that Bob and Northrup had their machines out in the open and were just starting to give them a final once-over.

Between five hundred and a thousand people were looking on, and their number was being constantly increased by fresh

arrivals. Among them J. P. recognized the leaders of the vociferous crew which was urging direct action; but they, like the rest of the throng, were kept at a distance and prevented from any hostile demonstration by the presence of the sheriff and a score of armed deputies.

One of these deputies peremptorily halted J. P. as the latter started to cross the field, and ordered him back to the fence; but the colloquy between them attracted the attention of Bob, and seeing who was being held up, he hurried over to interfere.

"That's all right, officer!" he shouted. "Mr. Perkins is one of my closest pals."

Never had a claim of friendship been less welcome to J. P. He had come down there, hoping to gain an unobtrusive word with Bob, not to be advertised to those watching fire eaters as his crony and partisan.

"The ivory-domed boob!" he muttered wrathfully.

Nevertheless, the mischief was done; nothing to do except make the best of it. With such grace as he could muster, J. P. shook hands.

"Anything I can do for you?" Bob asked. "If so, speak quick. You can see I'm pretty busy."

"Oh, no; not a thing," J. P. assured him, although he was careful to retain his clasp on Bob's hand. "Van and I just got back to town and learned of your trouble; so of course we hustled right down to see if there was any way we could help. I can't imagine where Van has got to." He looked around. "Probably one of these deputies has held him up. But you know, I hope, that you can count on us both to the limit."

Bob was genuinely touched.

"By George, I appreciate that." His voice choked a little. "There isn't anything you can do, of course; but—well, it makes a fellow feel mighty good to know that his friends are standing by."

J. P. covered up his relief with an expression of regret. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I was so anxious to be of aid, and so was Van. I mustn't detain you, though, Bob."

Yet he managed still to keep the other's

hand in a firm grip. "I'll just say so-long, Bob, old man, and wish you luck on your— Or, hold on a minute!" he interrupted himself, as if struck by a sudden idea. "We can at least look after your business interests, Bob, and see that they don't suffer in any way while you are absorbed in this search. Let's see; you didn't put your name to that paper you drew up, did you? Well, sign it now, and then we'll be in shape to go ahead. And I can promise you that we'll put a full head of steam on."

As he spoke he had whipped the unsigned paper out of one pocket and his fountain pen from another, and had thrust them into Bob's hands, with a pocketbook underneath to serve as a desk.

J. P. was an expert in the art of closing a deal. The way he could produce a fountain pen at just the proper psychological moment, and give the mental push required to get a hesitating victim's signature down on the dotted line, savored almost of magic. And poor Bob was not one to withstand his seductive wiles. With his head in a whirl over that amazing disclosure of Northrup's in regard to Faith—that he, Bob Moore, was the man she really cared for—nothing else seemed to matter except his task of finding and rescuing her.

He was in no condition to question or debate J. P.'s urgency to have him sign the paper. Disarmed by those specious protestations of friendship, and feeling somehow that he was being rendered a favor instead of doing one, he took the pen and started to write his name.

Once a kingdom was lost for the want of a horseshoe nail. With all his ingenious approach and his hurrah finish, J. P. had overlooked one very important detail. There was no ink in the fountain pen; it simply wouldn't write.

"Wait just a second. I'll get a pen from one of these deputies or somebody in the crowd," pleaded J. P. desperately.

But as he turned to hurry away, the iridescent silver glow which had been growing stronger in the east spread itself in a sheet of light across the earth, and the rim of a big, yellow disk rose above the horizon. The moon was up.

"Can't wait now, J. P.," Bob called over his shoulder as he started for his machine. "I'll see you when I get back."

A rod or two away from his plane he encountered Northrup, who had also been interrupted.

"How about you, Bob?" hailed the lieutenant. "Got your inspection all finished?"

"Not quite. I was called away by a visitor."

"Me, too. The colonel had got down into the dumps again, and needed to be bucked up. I didn't realize how time was passing while I was talking to him; but I'm not going to waste any more of it now. I'm taking off. My plane's all right. At least, it was when we landed this afternoon, and the farmer's had it right under his eye ever since."

But in this last statement Northrup was mistaken. There was a period of about ten minutes when the farmer had gone off to his house to put away a bottle of hooch which Mr. Pedro Ponce had presented with his compliments.

Bob hesitated a moment. It was against all his training and invariable custom to ascend in an airplane which he had not gone over thoroughly in search of flaws or defects. And yet it seemed a superfluous precaution in the present instance. He and Northrup had made sure of every bolt and stay and rivet before they went over to the station for lunch.

Example, too, is a powerful argument. If Cale Northrup, who had been reckoned in the service an extra careful aviator, was willing to take a chance, why shouldn't he?

"Well, I guess you're right," he yielded. "It sure does seem foolish to delay for a mere finicky formality when every moment counts. Let's go."

And without further debate the two hurried to their respective planes and climbed aboard. Two minutes later both of them were in the air and circling above the field. It had been agreed between them, since there was no clew to the direction which the abductors had taken, that Northrup should cover the mountain country as his territory, while Bob should investigate the desert.

Therefore, after a moment or two of upward climbing, Northrup straightened out to his course and sped away toward the looming ranges on the west.

Bob continued for a longer time at circling the field. It had been several months since he was up in the air, and besides he was operating an absolutely new plane. He wanted to get used to the feel of the joystick in his hand once more, and also to try the paces of his mount before he attempted much with it.

However, he very soon found that he had lost none of his former skill. The machine, too, to his delight, proved all that he could have wished, answering perfectly to the various controls, and showing no tricks or caprices in its steady flight.

By the end of fifteen minutes he felt that he was all set for his job, and, leaving the field with its ring of upward-gazing spectators behind him, sailed away across the spires and chimneys of the town and out over the desert.

The great dead expanse lay stretched out before him like a sea, with every hollow on its surface, every acclivity, every jutting rock, or growth of cactus as plainly visible in the vivid moonlight as though it had been midday.

He followed in his general direction the trail which he had covered that morning with Van Carpen and J. P. in the flivver; for he and Northrup had agreed that it would be useless to search the country nearer town than the Rawlinson tract, since that had been thoroughly gone over by the various automobile parties that had been out.

Bob's plan, instead, was to start in at about the location of the oil well, and, using that as a landmark, to traverse a circle of about a hundred miles in diameter, then by flying in narrowing circles to cover the whole interior territory. If he failed to discover anything, he would take another circle and follow the same line of procedure, and so continue.

It had taken them several hours to reach the oil well on that earlier trip, but at the rate he was traveling he expected to arrive there in less than thirty minutes.

Yet strangely enough when his air sense

and his watch told him that he should have reached the spot there was no sign of the derrick and the little huddle of shacks about it.

Could he have mistaken his direction? No; the stars indicated plainly to him the points of the compass. In addition, he had recognized several landmarks on the way which sufficiently confirmed his course.

Moreover, even if he had erred by as much as twenty miles, his increased range of vision due to the height of the plane should have enabled him in that clear air and with such brilliant moonlight to discern the objects of his quest.

It never struck him, of course, that the elaborate plant he had visited was a mere stage setting put up to impose on him, and that now having served its purpose, and with the performance over, it was on its way to the next stand.

Instead, baffled and at sea, he flew aimlessly hither and thither, hunting for a sight of it.

Mounting to a higher altitude in order to get a wider view, his searching gaze was finally caught not by the thing for which he was looking, but by a series of moving dots off on the desert.

Or, rather, it was the thing he was looking for, only in another and unrecognizable form. It was in fact the caravan of motor trucks with which Red was moving on with his properties and paraphernalia.

Bob never dreamed of such an explanation as this; but instantly he was on fire with excitement. The oil well and all his puzzled conjectures in regard to it were forgotten now. His one idea was to find out who was abroad on the desert at night in this fashion; for before he had started out he had learned that there would probably be no one on the trails who had a legitimate errand.

In such a sparsely settled country, where every householder knew all the other residents for miles around and most of the details of their movements, this had not been especially hard to determine. The sheriff after half an hour spent at the telephone had been able to assure him that with one or two trifling exceptions none of the desert folk would be stirring at night.

Consequently the sight of such a company as he now descried—and that, too, in a section where any justifiable travel was most unlikely—meant only one thing to Bob.

It must be the bandit gang making off with Faith to one of their strongholds.

Quickly he mapped out a plan of action. It was idle for him, of course, to think of engaging so numerous a party singlehanded. Instead, he must follow them to their destination and mark where they halted. Then, seeking the nearest telephone, he could call for reinforcements; and while the bandits rested and probably slept in fancied security they could be surrounded and taken captive.

But for the success of this maneuver it was highly essential that the gang should not know their movements had been detected.

Bob was up about two thousand feet at the time he sighted the caravan, and as nearly as he could judge between fifteen and twenty miles away from it.

In order to prevent being seen, and also to keep the zooming of his flight from being carried in that clear air, he promptly dropped to a five-hundred-foot level.

His idea was, since his speed was so much greater than that of his quarry, to occupy time by circling around and around at that height, and rise at intervals for a fresh reconnaissance. In this way he expected to maintain about the same relative distance between himself and the caravan, and while remaining out of sight or hearing by them still to keep them under observation.

"Some sweet little taxicab, I'll tell the world," he praised the plane as she slanted down on the fifteen-hundred-foot descent.

Throughout the trip he had been telling himself that never had he piloted a more proficient bus than this. He had attempted no especial stunts with it; but it had proved itself adequate to every demand made upon it—a rather remarkable thing, in view of the fact that it had received no preliminary tuning up.

The engine had run along as steadily as a watch; not a skip nor a jar had interrupted its rhythmic song. Neither had

there been any stiffness or unevenness in any of the working parts. Rudder, wings, everything responded instantly and smoothly to his lightest touch upon the controls.

But now as he reached the lower altitude after his coast, and straightened out to a level in that denser air, there came a sudden sharp crack, audible even above the bark of the engine.

As Bob turned his head, he saw to his dismay one of the struts snap like a pipe stem, and the next instant his left plane buckled and collapsed.

Desperately he tugged at the controls, trying to overcome the disability and right the wobbling machine; but it was a hopeless effort.

The plane struggled for a moment to maintain its equilibrium; then rolled over to one side and went into a tailspin.

Bob had time for just one swift thought as it went down:

"This ends any hope of rescuing Faith Howland, and all because I didn't take time for inspection before I started out. I sure am what they call me—a boob."

Then he crashed into the sand.

CHAPTER XVI.

WANTED: A SIGNATURE.

LEFT on the field amid the gaping populace of Guadalajara City, J. P. gazed at that big yellow cart wheel rolling up over the edge of the horizon, and opened his floodgates of profanity. Strictly speaking, he did not transgress *Juliet's* injunction: "Oh, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon!" But he certainly swore at it.

Fair Luna, to his mind, had robbed him of seventy-five thousand iron men, just as they were about to drop into his claws; and upon her, together with all makers of fountain pens, he lavished his choicest expletives, anathemas and imprecations. Unquestionably he had reason to feel sore. Instead of making the haul upon which he had counted, and which would have enabled him to get away before the eruption of public fury he felt sure was coming, all he had got out of the incident was to be

ticketed as one of the partisans of the chief miscreant.

If slip nooses or tar and feathers, or any other of those playful little favors of the mob, were to be distributed, he was certainly billed for his share. Already he saw darkly hostile glances being directed toward him from various quarters, and heard his name being passed about from lip to lip.

It did not seem an especially safe place to stay, there in that open field, with the crowd milling around and apt to start something at the slightest opportunity; so, seeking to attract as little attention as possible, he edged his way out and returned uptown.

Back on Main Street once more, where everything seemed moving along in a normal, conservative fashion with the usual line of traveling men tilted back in cane-seated chairs in front of the hotel, the usual group of small-town sports about the front of the cigar store, the usual romantic couples strolling across the plaza, and the usual family parties passing to the movies, his panic subsided to a considerable extent, but not his sense of defeat and resentment. Nor did it lessen his grouch, when he came scowling into the office, to find Van Carpen leaning back with his feet up on his desk, smoking a cigarette and acting as if he had not a care in the world.

"You seem to be taking things blamed easy," he growled with an irate glance at his partner.

"Sorry I can't say the same for you, old dear," airily responded Van Carpen. "The trouble with you, J. P., is that you regard conditions from the wrong angle. Remember, as Shakespeare says, 'There's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.' Smooth the wrinkles from your brow; be glad; and you'll soon find that everything is all for the best in this best of all possible worlds."

"You pull any more of that *Pollyanna* stuff on me, and I'll murder you," snarled J. P. "This is no time to be kidding. Things are breaking blamed bad for us, and the sooner we face the facts of the situation the better for us."

But Van Carpen only grinned.

"All right; let's face the facts." He lighted another cigarette. "Trot them out, old raven, in all their grisly horror."

J. P. seemed to find a sort of somber pleasure in complying.

On the financial side, as he pointed out, they were about at the end of their resources, with all their available cash sewed up, and their only chance of getting out whole the very slim one of annexing Bob Moore's seventy-five thousand dollars.

"They say there's a special Providence that protects children and fools," he said bitterly; "and I'm beginning to believe it. Twice to-day that shine has been on the edge of signing up, and twice he's been stopped by some crazy thing you'd never count on. It 'll be the same way every time we go after him."

But, J. P. continued, that wasn't all. There was a personal danger that menaced them. He was pessimistically convinced that Guadalajara City was about to start a frenzied uprising, and that, being now definitely catalogued as friends of Moore's, they might expect the same treatment.

"If they give him a necktie party," he prophesied, "make no mistake about it, we'll be second on the list."

Van Carpen laughed at his croaking.

"So that's what you call the facts, is it?" he commented satirically. "Pretty desperate outlook, what?"

"Well, where do you see any silver linings?" demanded J. P. "I suppose you're banking on Bob Moore's signing up that paper when he gets back from his air trip, eh?"

"No"—Van Carpen blew a smoke ring and watched it break—"that is just what I am not counting on."

"Then tell me how the dickens—"

"Wait a minute. Suppose Moore does not come back?"

"You mean, if he has an accident, breaks his fool neck?"

"Put it that way if you choose. Suppose, then, there is an accident; how do we stand?"

"If he is killed? Why, you fool, it sinks us. Until that paper is signed, his indorsement on those notes don't count for—"

"Who said anything about the paper not

being signed?" Van Carpen interrupted contemptuously. "It wouldn't be the first time we've supplied a missing signature."

"Oh, I see." J. P. frowned dubiously. "But what's the sense of figuring on anything like that? Moore's an expert aviator. It's odds-on against anything happening to him."

"On the contrary," said Van Carpen, "it's a certainty that something will."

"You mean?" J. P. gave a quick glance of question.

Van Carpen nodded.

"Neither Northrup nor Moore is going to return," he said nonchalantly. "Pedro doesn't do anything by halves. He mopped up clean while he was about it."

"He told you?"

"Sure. According to his report, the smash-up in both cases should have occurred by this time. That is the reason I told you you were doing a lot of unnecessary worrying."

J. P. considered this new development. He showed no horror at the disclosure. He was merely reflecting cold-bloodedly how it would affect themselves and their plans. And the lines of anxiety were not wholly erased from his brow.

"What arrangements did you make with the greaser?" he asked.

"Fifteen thousand for the kidnaping and this job together, to be paid as soon as we collect on Moore's notes. Then we'll have to pay Red ten thousand, and expenses will run five. Counting what we paid the colonel for his deed, we'll only make about ten thousand apiece out of Moore; but that's better than being in the hole. We may be able to pull off that bond-selling campaign."

"M-m-m. Sounds all right," muttered J. P. "But I don't like it. Too many people in the know. And this bootlegger would round on us in a minute. If I can once get my claws on that ten thousand, it's me for New York."

"Still scarey, eh?" sneered Van Carpen.

"Why not?" J. P. retorted. "You did not see that crowd down at the field. I tell you, they're just on edge to start something. And if they do—zowie!"

"Rot!" The other flipped his cigarette

into an ash tray. "What are they stirred up about? The supposed murder of the girl, of course. But she isn't murdered, and we know right where we can lay our hands on her. As a matter of fact, I have already wired to Santa Fé for an airplane; and to-morrow or next day I'll sail out and bring her home in triumph."

"Why, J. P.," he exclaimed, "with the credit I'll gain for rescuing the girl, and the colonel so grateful that he'll do anything I ask, we ought to clean up big here. This is no time to talk of pulling out. You get busy, instead, practicing on Moore's signature, and I'll start figuring the best way to turn our advantage into cash."

J. P., in default of further objections to offer, somewhat sulkily obeyed; and with one of the contracts Bob had signed propped up in front of him on his desk, set himself to studying the chirography of the name "Robert Moore," so as to stamp it so thoroughly on his mind that he could reproduce it without danger of detection.

Presently he began copying single letters or parts of letters and comparing them with the original. This ability to counterfeit the handwriting of others was a gift he had discovered as a boy, and was in fact the cornerstone of J. P.'s criminal equipment.

He had served a term in State's prison as a result of it when only eighteen, and had there become acquainted with Van Carpen, who was up for pocket-picking. So later, when Van had embarked upon his career of shady finance, and was facing an emergency where only the "correction" of some documents could save him, he had naturally sent for his old "college" chum; and in this way their association had been formed.

J. P. was really a wonder in his line, capable of that most difficult form of forgery, the duplication of another's signature in free hand, and doing it so perfectly that the man himself would almost believe in it. But he was out of practice now, and the results he achieved evidently did not satisfy him.

As he scowlingly labored away, filling sheet after sheet with his futile attempts to catch just the right slant and shading,

Van Carpen, still tilted back in his chair, smoked and built air castles of a roseate future.

With Moore and Northrup both disposed of, he saw no further bar to the complete success of his schemes. Those two would rest in unhonored graves as the perpetrators of the kidnaping. He could easily cook up some additional evidence to fasten it on them beyond dispute, while he would shine as the hero who rescued the girl.

Could Faith do less under the circumstances than accept him as her husband? Could the colonel do less than support and recommend any proposition he might present? With his share of Moore's seventy-five thousand dollars he could put up quite a front as a capitalist.

Oh, yes—Guadalajara City was in for a trimming!

There was just one little possible hitch in his program of matrimony and plunder, and as he thought of that his exultant smile gave way for a moment to an expression of uneasy concern.

But he shook his head. The contingency was too remote and unlikely to be worth serious consideration.

He looked over at J. P., still struggling over his pothooks and curlycues, and yawned. They had been up practically the whole night before, and the trip out to the desert that day had been a wearing one. His eyelids were beginning to grow heavy.

"Better call it a day and turn in, hadn't we?" he suggested. "Maybe your hand will be steadier in the morning."

"I want it ready to show as soon as the bank opens," his partner demurred without even looking up. "Just about twenty minutes more, and I think I'll have it. I'm getting the swing now."

The clock ticked on. Midnight was already past. J. P. toiled on doggedly, covering sheet after sheet of paper, only to give a grunt of disgust and tear them into tiny fragments. The waste-paper basket at his side looked as if it had struck a snowstorm.

Van Carpen, with nothing else to do, resumed his dreams of conquest. Suddenly the telephone bell tinkled. Van Carpen

and J. P. both started, then glanced at each other.

It was almost one o'clock now? Who the dickens could be calling them at that hour?

The telephone rang again. After a moment's hesitation J. P. picked up the instrument and answered.

"It's Red," he announced out of the corner of his mouth; then, speaking excitedly into the receiver: "What? What's that you say?"

Van Carpen, sensing from his tone that trouble of some kind was afoot, caught up an extension instrument on his desk and listened in.

Red's voice over the wire was worried and perturbed.

"That you, guv'nor?" he was saying. "I was hopin' I'd be able to catch you. I've just come twenty miles, getting to a phone. Say—do you get me?" He lowered his voice.

"Yes," J. P. answered impatiently. "Go ahead."

"Well, as I said before, we lost that excess baggage we was carrying. You understand what I mean, I guess."

Before J. P. could respond Van Carpen broke in agitatedly:

"My Lord! You surely are not talking about the package that Pedro delivered you last night?"

"Cut out the names there!" Red growled; then, in an injured tone: "Say, guv'nor, how many is in on this wire?"

"Just myself and Van, Red," J. P. reassured him. "That's all right. But, for Heaven's sake, tell me how such a thing could have happened?"

"Can't say myself. We started out all right, with the parcel tied up proper in the back of one of the trucks. Then about halfway on the road we noticed that it was gone, and a roll of stuff, blankets and one thing and another, was in its place. We went clean back over the trail a lookin' for it, but nary a sign of it could we find. Must 'a' hid out behind one of the sand hills, I s'pose."

"But, listen, Red!" J. P.'s voice was desperate. "That—that parcel has got to be found. Drop everything else, and never

give up searching until you have it. No; there's nothing else to say. And you understand me? That parcel must be found."

He slammed the receiver back on the hook, and turned on Van Carpen with savage resentment.

"A nice mess you've made of it!" he snarled. "The girl has got away from them."

"Oh, they'll find her all right." Van Carpen tried to speak confidently, but it was rather a failure. He was pale and shaky as a result of the news.

"Find her—when?" J. P. demanded scathingly. "She isn't on the trail; and you know that away from that the most experienced old desert rat can get hopelessly lost in ten minutes. And how long can she, a girl, keep going without food or water? Yes, they'll find her—when she's dead."

"By glory, Van Carpen!" he exploded. "We've got to do something. It isn't a case now of playing the hero; it's to save our necks." He fingered at his collar as if he already felt the clutch of the noose about his throat. "There's too many in the know, I tell you. Somebody is sure to squeal, and the responsibility will be traced back to us."

He crumpled up the sheet of paper on which he had been working, thrust it with the contracts into his pocket, and stood up.

"Hold on!" cried Van Carpen. "Aren't you going to do that signature? No matter what breaks, we'd better get hold of that seventy-five thousand."

For answer, J. P. held up his hand. It was shaking like that of an old man. The nerves of the forger must be under perfect control.

Once more something had happened to prevent the signing of that paper.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERT STUFF.

ANOTHER day. The sun came up with all its justly celebrated lighting effects, and turned the dull, drab wastes of the desert into a shimmer of gold

and purple and crimson like the carpet of an Indian rajah. From crest to crest of the sand dunes the warm glow glinted. The hollows and levels changed hue like a chameleon under its transforming touch.

On and on swept the sunlight until at last it rested on a mass of tangled wreckage that had once been an airplane, and set all its polished metal parts to winking in the reflection.

The flash caught the eye of a girl who was trudging along through the sand about half a mile away. She did not know the cause of the sparkle, and quickly threw herself on the ground as if to avoid observation. But when nothing happened she cautiously crawled to the top of the nearest sand hill and reconnoitered.

What she saw brought her to her feet with a cry of startled alarm and sent her hurrying toward the wreck.

Before, her footsteps had lagged, her shoulders had drooped; she had shown in every line that she was spent and weary. But now, keen with apprehension, her fatigue was forgotten, her head was thrown up, she fairly flew over the ground. Arrived at the smashed-up airplane, she hesitated a moment and half drew back; then, summoning all her resolution, she lifted one of the crumpled wings and peered underneath.

Down among the twisted wires and beside the overturned fuselage she saw the back of the luckless aviator.

"Cale! Cale Northrup!" she screamed, and, catching the huddled figure by the shoulders, tried to drag the man out on the sand.

He roused under her touch, twitched like a sleeper who does not wish to be awakened, and muttered thickly:

"Paging Mr. Northrup, eh? Well, don't disturb me. I think you'll find him over on the other side of the lobby."

Then he sat up, blinking vacuously about him. The girl fell back a step or two at the sight of him and gave a cry of amazement.

"Bob Moore!" she exclaimed.

Her voice recalled his scattered senses, and yet at the same time seemed to befuddle him still more.

"Faith?" He stared at her as if she were a ghost. "Faith Howland? Am I dreaming?"

He rubbed his eyes; he shook his head as if the situation were beyond his understanding, and his glance fell on the wreck of the airplane. Then he began to remember.

"I had a fall," he said. "The left wing buckled on me."

"Aren't you hurt?" she asked breathlessly. "When I found you I thought you were—were dead."

Somewhat vaguely Bob began to feel himself and stretch his arms and legs.

"I seem to be all there," he announced cheerfully. "Guess it only stunned me a bit."

He started to get up on his feet, but quickly sank back again with an involuntary cry of pain.

"Oh, you have broken your leg!" Faith exclaimed solicitously.

"No." He lifted it tentatively. "Leg's all right."

"Then it is your ankle. You have sprained it?"

Again he shook his head, wiggling the joint to prove that the injury was not there.

"I'll tell you," he confessed sheepishly; "it's—it's my big toe. I guess I must have stubbed it."

It was too much for Faith. She gasped, choked up; then, unable to control herself, sank down upon the sand and went off into peals of laughter.

"Bob Moore! Bob Moore!" The tears of mirth were running down her face. "Could anything so ridiculous have happened to any one else on earth? I see a smashed-up plane," she ran on, "I rush to it aghast, thinking that Cale Northrup has had a fall. I knew of no one else around here who might be flying. Under the piled-up ruin I find what seems to be a corpse. Then you calmly sit up and tell me you have stubbed your toe."

Again her almost hysterical laughter rang out; and, even though the joke was at his expense, Bob had to join in. And after all it was probably the best thing that could have happened to either of

them, for both had been through a wearing strain during the last twenty-four hours, and this yielding to hilarity eased their overtaut nerves.

"But how do you happen to be out here alone?" demanded Bob, when at last they had sobered down.

The question recalled her to her plight. Springing to her feet, she swept her gaze over the wide expanse of desert in every direction. But there was nothing in sight save the empty waves of sand.

"I must be on the watch," she said apprehensively. "They must not get a chance to recapture me."

"They? Who?" questioned Bob.

She shook her head to indicate that she did not know.

"It happened just after you left me so abruptly the other night, there by the old arroyo," she told him. "I was sitting in my car, debating whether to call you back or not, when a cloth was thrown over my head and I was seized from behind. I tried to struggle and cry out, but a sponge soaked with chloroform was held under my nose, and in spite of all I could do I became unconscious. The last thing I remember is being driven away in a car a prisoner."

"Some time later, though, I must have roused up; for I felt myself lifted out of the car and carried a short distance to another vehicle. It was an automobile truck, I think; because there were no seats, and I was laid out on the floor with an old horseblanket thrown over me. The blanket and the truck both smelled of whisky. But I did not have a chance to notice much of anything. My head was still woozy with the chloroform, and I drifted off to sleep."

"When I roused up again I was being transferred to another truck, which seemed to be full of machinery and things like that. I was put in on top of two big coils of rope, and I could smell engine grease somewhere near me; but I was blindfolded and tied, so that was about all I could make out."

"We must have gone a considerable distance, for we seemed to be traveling at a rapid rate of speed, and it was daylight when at last we stopped. I could tell that

by a glimmer of light which came through under one corner of my blindfold.

"The stuff was pulled out from the truck all around me, and I could hear hammering and a great giving of orders. I was still under the influence of the chloroform, you understand, and my memories are hazy and disjointed. But I had an impression that an oil-drilling camp was being set up, and somehow—perhaps from something I overheard—I got a suspicion that it was not for a legitimate purpose.

"Presently—how long after I don't know, for I had been asleep again—I was taken out of the truck and put in the back part of a rough shack. The gag was now taken from my mouth, and I was given something to eat; but my hands and feet were kept tied, and I was still blindfolded. However, as I told you, one corner of the blindfold was a little loose, and by working my face I had got it pushed up so that I could manage to see a bit from under it. In this way I caught a glimpse of the man I judged to be in command of the party, a rough-looking red-bearded fellow.

"Once more I fell asleep, and when I awoke again I felt stronger and my brain was much clearer. By degrees I succeeded in edging over to the side of the shack and getting my eye close to a knothole. It hardly seemed worth all the effort it had cost me, for all I could see was the desert. Still it was something. The time, as nearly as I could judge by the sun, was about noon, but after the camp was put up there was no work done, for I could hear no sounds of activity. It was like a Sunday in its lazy quiet.

"Then all of a sudden the man with the red beard began shouting orders, and there was a lot of commotion. I gathered that somebody was coming; but who it was or what the visit meant I couldn't make out. I had to satisfy myself with wondering.

"Evidently, though, it had nothing to do with me; for although the turmoil died down, and after a time I heard the arrival of a car, no one came near me. Neither did any one show up on the somewhat narrow patch of desert which I could see through my knothole. Still, I had nothing else to do, so I kept staring out, and at last

two men came strolling by and stopped about twenty feet away from my shack.

"One of them was the red-bearded man I had seen before, but the other kept his back toward me and I couldn't get a look at his face.

"At last, though, he turned, just as he was about to leave; and I almost fainted with amazement. It was Billy Van Carpen's partner, J. P. Perkins."

"What!" Bob straightened up as if he had unexpectedly backed into an electric dynamo, and gaped at her with drooping jaw and dilated eyes. "An oil-drilling camp? A red-bearded foreman? Perkins talking to him? Yesterday noon?" he stammered excitedly. "Why, good Lord, Faith, I was right there myself!"

"You?" It was her turn now to stare.

"Sure. I drove out to that camp with Perkins and Van. Can you beat it?" He made a hopeless gesture. "I was right there, not more than thirty yards away from you, when Northrup came after me to have me help search for you. In Heaven's name, Faith, why didn't you sing out when you saw J. P.?"

"I tried to," she explained, "but my throat was so stiffened from the gag that I could only give a sort of croak."

Glancing at her, Bob saw that her lips were still puffed and swollen from the chafing of the gag, and for a moment he looked ready to do murder.

"The brutes!" he ejaculated vindictively. "I'd just like to get my hands on them."

Faith went on, unheeding the interruption.

"No; I couldn't make anybody hear," she said. "And afterward I got to thinking that maybe it was just as well."

"Just as well?" Bob repeated indignantly. "How do you get that way? Do you think Northrup and I would have—"

"Ah, but I didn't know you were there, Bobolink! It only struck me that since J. P. was so chummy with the red-bearded man, the chances were that he already knew about my capture, if indeed he and Van Carpen were not directly responsible for it. You know, I've already told you that I believed those two a pair of crooks."

Bob roused up belligerently, as if once more to rush to the defense of his friends; but before the words came he paused, struck by a sudden recollection.

"By George!" he muttered, running his hand up through his hair in a puzzled way. "There's something mighty funny about all this. Did you say," he interrogated sharply, "that this oil-drilling camp was only set up yesterday morning after daybreak, and that after a few shacks had been knocked together and some apparatus set up no further work was done? I see it all now." He hardly waited for her nod of affirmation. "Oh, what a boob, what a triple-plated boob, I've been! But just wait till I get back."

She did not doubt from his words that he had let himself be trimmed.

"I'm afraid, Bob," she shook her head pityingly, "that by the time we get back you won't find them anywhere around. That kind of people don't linger long after they have made their haul."

"They'll be there," he said. "There's a paper they want me to sign, and they're so sure of me that— But here I am, chattering about unimportant things," he interrupted himself, "and you look all in. Wait until I browse around and see if I can't forage some breakfast for us. Then while we are eating you can tell me how you escaped from those scoundrels."

As he spoke he was hobbling over to his wrecked machine, and after a little exploration he came back with the thermos bottle of coffee and the package of sandwiches which Northrup had wisely induced him to take with him.

The hot coffee was just what the girl needed, bringing back the color to her face and overcoming her exhaustion.

"Well," she resumed her story, "Perkins and Van Carpen could hardly have been out of sight before the men began pulling down the shacks and breaking camp."

"Of course." Bob grinned wryly. "The sucker was satisfied. There was no further use for it."

"By sunset," she continued, "we were ready to start. As before, I was put in the back of one of the trucks and covered over

with an old blanket. But there was this difference. I now had my wits fully about me, and also by constant rubbing and twisting I had managed to loosen one of the knots that bound my hands. By the time it was dark I had my hands free, and then of course it was short work to untie my feet and get rid of the blindfold.

"The next thing was how to make my get-away. I decided to emulate the little red hen of the old nursery story, who when captured by a fox, waited until he sat down to rest, then pecking a hole in the bag in which he was carrying her off to his den, got out and slipped a stone into the bag in her place.

"Very cautiously so as not to attract the attention of the driver, I gathered enough articles from around and underneath me to make a sort of a dummy under the blanket that would pass for me.

"Then watching my chance until we had just topped a rise and started down the other side, so that I would not be observed by the driver of the truck next behind, I dropped out at the back and rolled quickly to the side of the trail."

"But, good Heavens!" Bob gave a shiver. "If you had been stunned by the fall, or twisted your knee, or anything, that next truck would have run over you before it could have been stopped."

"I knew that, but it was the risk I had to take. The most thrilling moment, though, was when I lay there at the side of the trail in the bright moonlight, as the line of trucks passed by, expecting each second to be detected.

"However," she concluded, "not one of the drivers noticed me. Then I lay still, scarcely daring to breathe, until the line of trucks was about a mile away, when I got up and ran. I had no plan. My idea was to get as far away from the trail as possible. I wandered all night. Then I saw the wing of the plane sticking up, and came to you."

"You must be half dead," said Bob tenderly. "Now, do you know what I am going to do? I am going to make a sort of shade out of this airplane wing to protect you from the sun, and you are going to get under it and go to sleep."

"But suppose they should come?"

"Trust me to give them the wrong steer. If it's only one or two, I'll bend my gun on them and tell them to beat it. If it's a larger party, I'll cover you with sand as soon as I sight them and stick a piece of hose down for you to breathe through; and then make them think I am all alone."

"But we ought to be moving," she protested. "What's left of that coffee and sandwiches isn't going to provide for us indefinitely. We must be getting somewhere."

"We'll be getting somewhere fast enough," he reassured her. "When Cale Northrup finds that I don't show up this morning, he is certain to start out looking for me. And we couldn't have any better guide post for him to locate us by than this heap of junk."

Convinced by this argument, Faith followed his suggestion, and was soon wrapped in slumber while Bob kept faithful watch and ward outside her improvised pavilion.

But when at noon she awoke refreshed and they had disposed of the last of the sandwiches and most of the coffee, and still there was no sign of Northrup both of them began to look rather anxious.

And when at four o'clock they were still vainly watching the sky, they were forced to come to a new decision. This was hastened by an unfortunate mishap on the part of Bob. He was rationing out a drink apiece for them from the scant remnant of coffee when he awkwardly knocked over the thermos bottle and spilled all its contents.

One may do without food for a reasonable time in the desert. In that dry, furnacelike atmosphere one cannot do without some equivalent for water. There was nothing to do but start without delay in the hope of getting to a water hole. Estimating their position as well as she could, Faith judged that the nearest one was about twenty miles away.

That stubbed toe was no longer a joke. Every step cost Bob a twinge of agony. But he shut his teeth, and with the aid of a stick he had wrenched away from the airplane, limped along.

And Faith was in little better plight. Her night's wandering had practically worn away the soles of her thin shoes, and the

burning sand was to her like red-hot plowshares.

Under the circumstances they naturally did not progress very fast. They had advanced perhaps a couple of miles when Faith suddenly stopped.

"No wonder you want to rest," commented Bob. "Whew! It's hot!" For the wind had shifted, the sky was over-spread with a coppery glow, the air was like the breath from a volcano.

"Oh, it isn't the heat," cried Faith. Her face was white in that lurid light. "It's a sand storm, and an awful one. Look!"

She pointed to the rapidly diminishing horizon. Already the desert was beginning to whirl and undulate about them. A stronger puff of wind sent a spatter of fine sand against their cheeks that stung like bird shot.

Bob's eyes grew hard. He had never seen an exhibition of the power of the desert in this, its most terrible manifestation; but he had heard enough stories of sandstorms to realize the danger.

Wildly he looked around him. No shelter anywhere in sight. Not even so much as a rock or a mesquite bush to shield them from that furnace blast.

Even the frail protection that the wrecked airplane might have given them was lost. It was idle to think of retracing their steps and reaching it in time.

They were out on the open plain, exposed to the full fury of the wind and the machine gun fire of a million shrieking sand devils. And the fiery deluge was almost upon them.

What were they to do?

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TASTE OF INFERNO.

THE desert is always referred to by those familiar with it as "she."

Contrariwise, mountain peaks are generally endowed with the masculine gender. They bear the names of kings, statesmen or explorers, or else, like a village ne'er-do-well, some such disrespectful appellation as "Old Baldy."

As to the reason for calling a mountain "he" there is a difference of opinion. Some

say it is because of rugged strength and lofty sublimity of character; others, because their tops are invariably of solid granite.

But the feminine quality of the desert is beyond question. She is the Theda Bara of Nature's movie show—a sleek and shining tigress basking in the sunshine, but ready in a second to turn and rend you, or in her moments of greatest fury to pause and fondle you, uncertain, mysterious, always pulling a surprise when you least expect it.

In none of her manifestations is she more ruthless and devastating than with a sandstorm. The hapless wayfarer who is caught by it away from shelter is buffeted, beaten, stung and peppered by a volleying sweep of small particles from every direction, raked as by flying bullets, blinded, choked, knocked down.

There is no recourse except to lie flat upon the surface; and that is swirling and undulating and heaving like the waters of a maelstrom. The sun and sky are blotted out; the air thick with sand and hot as an oven is impossible to breathe. One stifles and suffocates. It is black as midnight all around; there is a deafening uproar and turmoil—a banging and shrieking and howling as of ten thousand devils. The battling winds scoop up great masses of sand and hurl them at each other, sometimes burying unfortunate travelers under the weight of tons.

But there is another peril beside that of being smothered or buried alive. Often in the wake of a sandstorm are found corpses, blackened, charred, shriveled as if a wave of white-hot flame had passed over them; victims, it is supposed, of some peculiar electric demonstration which accompanies these cyclonic convulsions.

Almost as awesome, too, as its riot of death and fury is the suddenness, the utter lack of warning with which a sandstorm comes.

Ten minutes before, as Bob and Faith plodded along, the sun had been shining from a cloudless sky, and there had been no more than the whisper of a breeze. The wide, barren plain stretched like a sea of gold as far as the eye could reach.

And now their vision was restricted to a rapidly narrowing circle hardly a mile

across. Earth and sky were both of a murky, copper hue. The wind was shrieking so that they had to raise their voices to a shout to make themselves heard above it.

"Not a chance for us!" muttered Faith as her gaze swept hopelessly from their exposed position to the advancing simoon. "It's going to be terrific!"

"If only I hadn't stubbed my toe," groaned Bob, although what difference that made it would have been hard to tell.

A bellowing gust of wind swept over them, almost carrying them off their feet and filling their eyes, mouths and noses with sand.

"Crouch down! Crouch down!" screamed Faith. "And muffle your head in your coat. That is your only hope."

She thought he did not understand, and caught his arm to drag him down beside her. Already she had stepped out of her skirt and had it wrapped over her head and shoulders like a burnoose.

But Bob resisted her efforts. He was standing, staring fixedly off to the left, peering through the murk.

"I saw the gleam of water!" he declared. "Just for a second, as the light shifted. Then it was gone, blotted out."

"Water?" She flung her arms in ex-postulation. "There's none within twenty miles. Get down!" as he still stood, gazing. "You saw nothing. A mirage perhaps? A trick of the light?"

"No!" he shouted. "There it is again. Look!"

The desert had sprung another of its bewildering surprises. Through the gloom and darkness of the storm, a rift of sunlight played like a moving finger; and where it pointed one could see the banks of a shallow ravine through the soil, and the sparkle of running water.

So narrow was the stream that in the clear daylight, with that whole shimmering, sunlit plain to fill the eye, one could easily pass it by unnoticed; but in the obscurity and darkness that one shaft of radiance brought it out in bold relief. It was like the play of a spotlight upon a dimly lit stage.

"It can't be true!" Faith gasped. "It's an illusion."

But Bob did not stop to argue the ques-

tion. Snatching her hand, he dragged her on with him in the direction where he had seen the miracle.

The transitory gleam of sunlight was gone now. It had pierced the thick veil of the storm for but an instant. Almost complete darkness encompassed them; even the blinding glare of the lightning showed the way for but a foot or two in front of them.

Through the blackness and the uproar they stumbled on, lashed by stinging volleys of sand, fighting against those hurricane blasts. A dozen times they were hurled to the ground, blown apart, in danger of losing each other. Bob's injured toe was forgotten in the excitement of the struggle.

They were bruised, battered and bleeding, for the storm slashed their exposed hands and faces. If they gained two yards, the next onslaught of the wind seemed to lose them ten. Breath was gone, they were blind, the last ounce of endurance seemed slipping.

Faith gave way and fell heavily to the ground. Bob leaned over and tried to pull her to her feet, but she lay inert. She was either unconscious, or beyond further effort. Useless to try and speak to her; his voice would be carried a mile away almost before it left his lips.

He gathered her up in his arms and plunged on. He had lost all sense of direction now. He was staggering, weaving like a drunken man; his head bursting like that of a diver who has remained too long beneath the surface. Consciousness was going. Yet still by a sheer impulse of will he floundered forward.

Then suddenly his foot found nothing under it, and he and the girl went down together—down out of the wind and the smother of sand into a narrow channel of clear, ice-cold water.

The shock of it brought them both to. Faith, who was underneath Bob and completely immersed, began to struggle. He lifted himself to let her get her head above the surface, and almost had his own head blown from his shoulders for his pains.

Quickly he ducked back. Then, his eyes cleared by the water of the dust and grit which had filled them, he saw their situation.

The stream into which they had so op-

portunately tumbled had cut more deeply into the desert on one side than the other, and this higher bank happening to be toward the wind served them as a shield and defense.

Across the shallow chasm—it was little more than a ditch—the sand swept in solid sheets, for the storm was now at its height. But down in the rivulet's bed, under the edge of that lee shore, there was a space of a few inches where one might breathe.

They were saved! And yet—so quick is human nature to find cause of complaint—Bob, even as he thrilled to the knowledge that the peril was over, found himself wishing that the water was not quite so cold.

Already his teeth were chattering, and he was shivering from head to foot. And, although she gamely made no murmur, he knew that Faith was in an equally uncomfortable plight.

Still there was nothing to do but cling to their refuge, and be thankful for it. The uproar was now something indescribable, the glare of the lightning almost continuous, the velocity of the sand-charged wind like that of a rifle bullet. Anything in its path was doomed to extinction.

How long the storm lasted neither of them could tell. It may have been ten or fifteen minutes; to them it seemed a century.

But gradually the wind diminished, the blackness lessened, the thunder receded into the distance.

Then all at once the thing was over. The sun was shining, the sky was blue and cloudless; the desert lay drowsing, so calm and serene and innocent looking that one could scarcely believe it capable of kicking up such didoes.

Bob and Faith, blue and shaking from their immersion, rolled out of the water and lay prone on the bank, too done up by their experience even to talk. They were chilled to the bone, exhausted both mentally and physically; and they were willing just to bask inert in the welcome sunshine.

The warmth and the aridity of the air soon dried their wet garments, and at the same time a peculiar stimulating quality in it restored their spirits and brought back their strength.

Bob finally sat up.

"Lucky thing I happened to sight this little old brook," he commented. "It may not be any Mississippi, and I'll tell the world it's a bit chilly; but it certainly done noble by us all right."

"I still can't believe in it." Faith raised herself on one elbow and gazed frowningly at the tiny stream. "Why, Bob, I know this part of the desert thoroughly, and every foot of it has been gone over by oil prospectors. If you told any one who lives around here that you'd found water in this locality they'd say you were crazy. There isn't a drop of it within twenty miles."

"Maybe you're mistaken in your bearings?" he suggested. "We may not be where you think we are."

"No." She pointed to a butte of scarred, black rock which poked itself up out of the desert some six or seven miles away. "That is a landmark everybody is familiar with. I could not be mistaken in that."

"The only way I can account for the water being here"—she looked a bit frightened—"is to believe that it was a miracle in our behalf like the one that happened to Hagar in the Bible. But what you or I have ever done to deserve a miracle, I don't know."

"Well, so far as that goes," observed Bob, "I never heard that Hagar was an especially exemplary character. The reason she ran away to the wilderness was because she'd been sassy to her mistress and got frightened. Maids in those days apparently didn't have everything their own way, with Thursday afternoons and every other Sunday off."

He evidently didn't take much stock in the miracle theory.

"I'll tell you," he said, rising to his feet; "suppose, if you feel up to walking, that we explore a bit, follow the course of the stream and see where it gets to. I have an idea that it will lead us before long to some human habitation; for I'm still convinced that you must be mixed up on your landmarks."

She obstinately shook her head at this explanation; but, nevertheless, got up to accompany him.

"Which way shall we go?" she asked.

"Downstream," returned Bob confidently. "It's a law of nature that small water courses empty into larger ones, and the bigger the stream the more apt we are to find houses along it."

But in spite of this jaunty certainty they had not traveled very far before they found this rivulet turning out to be something of a paradox. Instead of growing larger the farther it flowed, it visibly decreased in size.

By the time they had followed it a couple of miles, it was reduced to a mere trickle; and a little further on it ended altogether in a patch of wet sand.

"There's another thing that's struck me about it," said Faith as he stood staring nonplused at this unexpected phenomenon. "Have you noticed, Bob, that there is no vegetation along the banks? Did you ever see anything like that before?"

"By George, you're right!" He scratched his head bewilderedly. "Darned if it don't almost look like magic or something. It wouldn't surprise me a bit now to see the whole thing disappear."

"And yet it's water for sure." He stooped down and, scooping up a palmful of it, drank it down. "Mighty good water, too. Let's follow it the other way."

Accordingly, they retraced their steps, and still found the puzzling stream transgressing all the regular rules; for the nearer they approached its source, wider grew the channel, and greater the volume of water.

Winding in an out among the sand hills it led them, until Bob suddenly paused, struck by the familiarity of the scene.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "If I am not mistaken, this is just about where I came to that fake oil camp of Van Carpen's and J. P.'s yesterday. I know the place by those three funny looking cactuses over there together."

As he finished speaking he pressed hurriedly ahead, where the stream circled around the base of another dune; and then turning, shouted back excitedly to Faith:

"It's here!" he called. "This is where the camp was all right. The litter they left is all around. And this is where the water comes from, too."

"Where the water comes from?" she asked wonderingly as she hastened forward.

"Yes." He pointed to the pipe projecting from the old oil well, which Red had declared all fixed for shooting, and which J. P. had so impressively ordered capped.

No capping had been done; the derrick and all the other stage properties which had been used to fool Bob were gone. But the well had unquestionably come in—not with petroleum, but with a spouting flow of crystal-clear water.

This was the source of the stream which, making its way out into the desert, had proved their salvation.

"I can understand it all now," Bob announced sapiently. "When the original drilling of this old well was stopped it was probably within a few inches of striking one of those underground rivers which are so frequently come across in New Mexico. Then when Red, to make a showing, gave it a further jab or two yesterday, he perforated this thin remaining layer. The water merely seeped through at first; then seeking its level, and most likely after the crowd had left, burst through in force.

"There!" he smiled. "Your miracle, you see, was due to perfectly natural causes."

"But a miracle for us, just the same," she maintained stoutly. "Don't you dare run it down, Bob Moore!"

As she spoke they had drawn nearer the edge of the pool made by the cascading flow from the pipe, and from which the stream led away into the desert.

"Ah!" Bob exclaimed, leaning down to the bank. "Here is another proof that this water is only a very recent phenomenon. Out there where we first encountered it, you noticed there was no vegetation. But here, where it has been since last night, you can see the grass and weeds already starting to sprout."

Sure enough. All around the bank of the pool tiny blades of green were poking their heads up through the soil.

Faith bent over and stirred one of the sproutlets with her finger. Bob, however, had turned away and was gazing again at the water pouring out of the pipe as if from a burst main.

"I suppose it is rank ingratitude," he said ruefully; "but I can't help thinking

what that would mean to me if it was oil instead of water."

Faith glanced up quickly.

"Bobolink," she said, "why don't you have your eyes examined?"

He stared at her seeming irrelevance.

"Have my eyes examined?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, no," she teased. "You scoffed at my miracle, and I'm going to let you guess. And I don't believe an oculist could help you much, after all. There are none so blind as those who won't see."

CHAPTER XIX.

A DAY OF MIRACLES.

BOB tried in vain to coax from Faith an explanation of her enigmatic remark; but she only laughed bafflingly, as if she were treasuring some supremely humorous joke.

"All right," he shrugged at last; "have it your own way. But I'll swear I can't see anything so killingly funny in the situation. We've got water, it is true, plenty of it; but we're still twenty miles away from anything that looks like chow. And I could surround a porterhouse steak very comfortably right now. This air gives you an appetite."

"But I thought you said Cale Northrup was sure to come and get us?" She suddenly grew sober.

"I said he was sure to come looking for us. And I knew he couldn't fail to spot the wreck of my plane. But now I'm wondering, if he alights at the plane and finds no trace of me, whether he won't figure that I've wandered off and perished in the sand-storm?"

"What I ought to have done," he muttered with belated compunction, "was to leave a note for him."

"Surely," said Faith. "But since we didn't, the only thing is to write one now, and I'll go back to the plane with it."

"You will not," Bob protested. "You've been through enough for one day. I'll take that little hike myself."

"But your lame toe?" she cried.

"My lame toe? Oh—er—" He stretched his foot out and regarded it per-

plexedly. "Say, do you know, ever since the sandstorm I've forgotten all about it."

"Now, what do you make out of that?" He grinned sheepishly. "I've heard of people being scared out of a year's growth; but this is the first time I ever knew of it going to the feet."

Whatever the reason, though—whether the hot sand through which he had been walking had allayed the inflammation, or whether exercise had snapped a dislocated joint back into place the pain and soreness were all gone. He proved this by lightly shuffling a few dance steps.

But now Faith objected to being left alone. The sun was setting, and darkness would soon be upon them. A tenderfoot like himself, she pointed out, might easily get lost in the desert. She would worry about him all the time he was gone.

The upshot of the argument was that they set out together.

But when they reached the spot where Bob had crashed to earth, a surprise awaited them. The wrecked airplane was nowhere to be seen. Instead, the place where they had left it was covered by a great mound of sand. Offering an obstacle to the sweep of the wind in the storm, it had been covered over, buried under a mountain of flying grit. To extricate it would require hours of labor, and a corps of expert shovelers.

Had the two remained there, or had they been able to return to it as a refuge from the storm, they also would have been entombed and their fate never known, unless some other freakish wind disintegrated the mound and revealed their bleaching bones. They walked slowly around the hillock, their faces a little pale at the thought of the narrowness of their escape.

"No use to leave a note now," Bob commented with a shake of the head. "Cale would fly right over this and never dream that it was different from any of the other dunes."

The sight of something projecting from a sort of hollow or depression on one side of the mound caught his eye at that moment, and he scrambled up to investigate.

It proved to be a bit of the shattered left wing of the plane, which, being uppermost when the machine hit the ground, had been

less deeply covered over than the remainder; and what showed was the exact spot where the wing had started to buckle.

Bob gave a slight tug at it as if to see how fast the apparatus was imbedded; and to his surprise the strut on which he had laid hold came away in his hand.

He gazed at it wonderingly; then with a startled exclamation came sliding down the mound to where Faith stood.

"Look at that!" He held out the slender spar indignantly. "That didn't break of itself. See; it was sawed almost in two with a very fine steel saw, and then left so that it would snap under the first hard strain."

"You mean—" She stared at him.

"Just that." He nodded. "Some treacherous hound was out to get me. And I think I can name him, too." His brow darkened. "I'm no Sherlock Holmes; but it looks to me very much as if this whole thing—the fake oil well, your abduction, and this attempt to get rid of me—was all part of one big conspiracy. Maybe, also, there have been other things going on that—"

He broke off suddenly, as if struck by a new suggestion.

"By George!" he gasped.

"What? What is it?" cried Faith.

"Northrup," he muttered. "I've been wondering all day why he didn't show up. This may be the explanation of it." He held up the telltale strut. "They may have tried the same game on him, and—well, he may not have been as lucky as I was."

"But Cale is always so overcareful," she protested. "He told me when he was teaching me never to dream of taking off until I had thoroughly inspected every part of my plane, no matter what the temptation might be to let it go."

"I know, I know," assented Bob gloomily. "But this is one time where we both took a chance; and with this proof of dirty work in connection with my plane"—again he held up the broken strut—"I can hardly doubt that something of the sort was done to him."

She turned away convinced, and hid her face in her hands. Once Bob would have construed her emotion as sorrow over the

loss of her lover; but now he knew from Northrup's own lips that it was but a natural grief for one who had been brought up with her as a brother.

He took her in his arms and tried to soothe her. She clung to him, weeping, her frame shaken by sobs. So they sat there on the sand while the sunset glow in the west slowly faded and dusk deepened across the desert.

At last Faith raised her head with a start.

"Some one is coming!" she whispered.

Bob bent his ear to listen; then gave a quick nod of assent. Across the silence came the *chug-chug* of a rapidly approaching motor car.

They rose to their feet and stood gazing in the direction of the sound. Finally they were able to see a flivver moving through the twilight toward them.

Bob was just about to step out and hail it; but Faith laid a cautioning hand on his arm.

"Better wait until we see who it is," she advised. "If it's a car from Guadalajara City I'll know it; and then it will be time enough to speak."

Accordingly, they crouched down behind the big heap of sand and waited for the flivver to go by. But, instead, it drove up almost to where they were hiding and halted.

The driver, a tough-looking fellow, climbed down and, lifting a can of water out of the back, filled up the radiator.

"Getting too dark to do any more looking now," he addressed his companion. "No use trying it agin till moonrise. Might as well tie up here, and hang on the nose-bag."

"Thanks for them kind words, Slim." The other dismounted with alacrity and stretched himself. "This danged old buck-jumper of a car has got my backbone jammed clean up into my neck."

He busied himself in getting a small oil stove, some cooking utensils and a sack of provisions out of the back of the flivver, and setting up an impromptu kitchen on the sand.

"Seems to me it's all plumb foolishness doing any more of this searchin', anyhow," he grumbled. "If the gal was anywhere

around in this part of the desert she'd 'a' been right in the track of that sandstorm; and there ain't no woman alive could ever have got through a rip-snorter like that. Chances are she's buried over too deep ever to show up short of the Judgment Day."

"That's what I told Red," nodded Slim. "But he says to keep pluggin' away at it just the same. He says the guv'nor, as he calls him, is in a turrible sweat over us losin' the gal. Red gets him on the phone over to Guadalajara City after the sandstorm, and gives him about the same line of dope that you've been handin' me. But the guv'nor hits the ceilin' at any talk of quittin'. He says to keep on; that gal has got to be found, if we have to turn the desert upside down to do it. Dead or alive, she's got to be found."

Faith was clutching Bob's arm as they listened. No doubt now about the wisdom of her caution in regard to the approaching flivver. These men were members of the gang which had abducted her, and were right at the present time engaged in searching for her under orders to find her dead or alive.

So close were the two that Bob and Faith dared not speak. They hardly dared even to breathe. They could but lie there motionless behind the sand hill and telegraph their thoughts to one another by little clutches of their interlocked fingers.

The least stir or movement on their part would probably result in immediate detection. They could not creep away without being seen. Yet, if they remained where they were until the moon came up, they were equally certain to be discovered.

If only he had been wise enough to bring a gun with him on his expedition, Bob lamented mentally. Both these men had two revolvers apiece hung at their belts; but with an automatic he would have taken a chance at them.

Twice, as it was, he got so worked up over their talk that he was on the point of rushing out and engaging them, unarmed and single-handed. Only the dissuading grip of Faith's hand on his restrained him.

Meanwhile, the two roughnecks, crouched down on their haunches, were occupied with preparations for supper. Fat slices of bacon

were sizzling in a frying pan; coffee was boiling.

The mingled odors from these preparations wafted to the nostrils of Bob and Faith, set them both almost crazy. They had gone all day long, and through wearing exertions, with nothing more to stay them than a few sandwiches; and as Bob had said, that air was stimulating to the appetite. Both of them were ravenous.

The fellow called Slim was showing a touch of impatience.

"Hurry up with that bacon," he snapped. "First thing you know Red and the bunch 'll be along afore we've had a chance to eat. I want everything cleaned up and out of the way, so that we can put up a bluff to Red that we've been searching, even if we ain't. Darkness won't count as no excuse to him. He'd be sore if he thought we'd laid off even for a minute."

"Bacon's just ready to dish up," returned the other, deftly flipping his pan so as to turn over the golden brown slices, and send out a perfect burst of savory redolence.

It was more than Bob could stand. He roused up on fingers and toes, sniffing like a famished lion. Faith, too, was sniffing. That dissuasive grip of hers was no longer so urgent. There are few more powerful arguments than hunger.

Suddenly Bob sprang to his feet and started for the two bending over the oil stove.

"Hands up!" he barked almost involuntarily, and thrust forward his leveled forearm as if it were a weapon.

It was the old trick of pointing a pipe or a screwdriver to fool an adversary; only Bob had neither a pipe nor a screwdriver, he had nothing but his finger.

Neither did he do it premeditatedly. He had no especial plan as he rose up. It was a sort of spontaneous inspiration, born of the moment.

Nevertheless, it worked. The eyes of Slim and his comrade were dazzled from leaning over the flame of the oil stove, and Bob was in the dark. They never dreamed of course that any one would be such a boob as to go after them without a weapon.

Quick as a flash both of them elevated

their arms, and, straightening up, stood waiting as Bob advanced toward them.

But Faith saw that if he once got into the circle of light cast by the oil stove, the deception would be discovered.

"Stand still, Bob!" she called sharply. "Don't go too close. Hold them where you are, and I'll get their weapons."

As she spoke she ran swiftly forward, and circling around behind the two disgruntled bad men, deftly relieved them of their guns, and carried the collection back to Bob.

Then, like a swallow, she darted back to the oil stove; for her nose warned her that the bacon in the frying pan was burning. Just in time she snatched it off the blaze.

"Good girl!" Bob commented admiringly. "And now, if you'll take one of these guns and bend it on our friends yonder until I can get them tied up, we'll eat the supper that they've so kindly prepared for us."

"No," demurred Faith. "If you don't mind, Bob, I think I'd like to do that little job myself. Unless I'm mistaken, this Slim was the one that tied me, and turn about is only fair play."

So, getting some ropes out of the flivver, she proceeded to bind the two captives in an exceedingly expert and workmanlike fashion. It's a pretty thin-blooded Western girl that doesn't know how to use a rope for something besides a clothes line.

"They'll probably be able sooner or later to wriggle out of those knots," she observed when she had finished; "but it won't be until we are quite a distance away from here."

She did not take the trouble to gag them. "Let them howl, if it amuses them," she said. "There'll be nobody to hear."

However, the language of the prisoners was such when they learned how they had been tricked that she did not encourage remaining any longer with them than necessary.

"Let's be on our way," she said to Bob. "We can make sandwiches out of this bread and bacon, and fill up the thermos bottle with coffee, and eat as we drive along."

Accordingly, they commandeered the flivver and started off. Both were naturally in an exultant mood over their exploit. The

coffee and bacon, even though the latter was a little scorched, tasted like nectar and ambrosia to their famished lips.

As Faith munched away at her third sandwich she began to giggle.

"Bob," she said, "has it struck you yet that we're playing a sort of return date on all the old-time miracles? First, it was Hagar at the well, and now it's Elijah fed by ravens."

"Yes," said Bob, hastily swallowing the remainder of his sandwich; "and now I want a third miracle to happen. Will you marry me, Faith?"

And, letting go of the wheel, he took her tumultuously into his arms. For a while the flivver ran itself.

When at last they had returned to something like normalcy again, Faith spoke demurely.

"Well," she said, "as my grandmother has often remarked, you can't tell what the young people of to-day will be up to next. I never dreamed that I should be proposed to in a desert flivver by an unshaven cave-man with more guns on him than W. S. Hart, or that my betrothal kiss would be flavored with bacon grease. Still," she added, "I'm willing to admit that I like it."

"You darling!" exclaimed Bob rapturously. And again the flivver was left to its own devices.

"I'm afraid, though," he sighed with his cheek pressed close to hers, "that I'll have to ask you to wait a long time. The way that this Rawlinson tract deal has turned out means that I'll have to start in all over again."

"Why, Bob," she exclaimed eagerly, "don't you know that you are—"

But she broke off with a startled grab at his arm.

"Look out where you are going!" she cried. "Mind you wheel!"

It was too late. The flivver running down a little bank, plunged into a patch of wet sand and sank in above the hubs.

The wheels could get no purchase. No matter how the engine was manipulated, they simply spun around and around, churning up the water and sand, but making no progress.

With a muttered anathema, Bob sprang out to see what he could do; and immediately went down to his armpits. It was only by clutching at the flivver that he saved himself from going deeper; and it required a tremendous exertion on his part and all the aid that Faith could lend him, before he succeeded in extricating himself.

"Quicksand!" he gasped as he flopped panting back into the car. "And no bottom to it. That darned flow of water from the oil well has struck a patch of it here in the desert, and we had just the luck to run into it. Now what are we going to do?"

"But why doesn't the flivver sink into it?" asked Faith.

"It is sinking; only it presents more surface, and so goes down more slowly. I'll tell you"—he spoke soberly—"we're in a darned bad fix."

A bad fix, it was, indeed; and although both of them bent all their wits to a solution of the problem, they failed to find it.

While they sat pondering and discarding one suggestion after another, the moon rose; but that did not help them in any way. It merely showed them more plainly how desperate was their plight. All around them was the quicksand, too wide to be jumped across or bridged in any way, and Bob's experiment had already revealed the futility of attempting to wade it. Also, slowly but surely the flivver, their only refuge, was sinking into those treacherous depths. The oozy sand was now lapping within an inch of the floor.

"Listen!" Faith suddenly raised her head. "I hear something."

She was right. Another minute left no doubt of that. The pant of motor cars driven at high speed throbbed upon their ears.

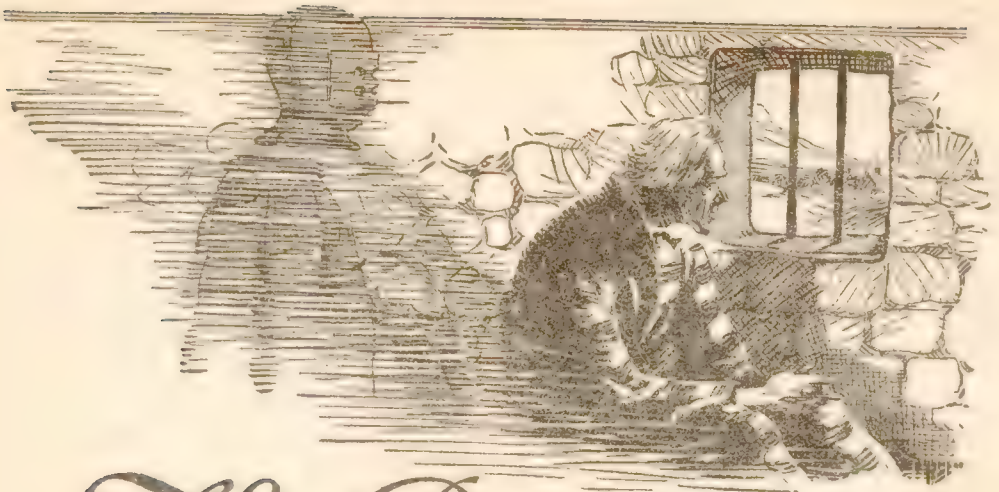
"It is another miracle," cried Faith joyfully. "We are going to be rescued."

Nearer and nearer came the sound. At last the cars themselves hove into view—two big machines filled with men, who as they sighted the flivver, let out a yell of triumph; Red and his crew.

Yes; they would be rescued—if you wanted to call it that.

They were between the devil and the deep sea.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



The Prisoner

By **ELLIOT BALESTIER**

IF you drive twelve miles north-north-west from the town of Brattleboro, Vermont, you will come, over the corrugated surface of the Green Mountain State, to a point where the hills, dropping away with startling abruptness, form the beautiful valley of the West River—a wide, shallow, turbulent tributary of the Connecticut, little more than an exaggerated brook at some seasons, at others a roaring torrent.

Another mile or two twisting downward at an angle of approximately forty-five degrees will bring you to the little village of Newfane, snuggling comfortably at the foot of the overshadowing mountains, sleepy and peaceful, alike in the shade of its maples and huge umbrella elms and under its four months' shroud of snow.

The quaint old houses, square and green-shuttered, straggle along its single wide street, set deep in their "front yards" that in summer are aflame with all the colors of the hollyhock, marigold, fuchsia, dahlia, petunia, and a dozen other old-fashioned flowers, whose very names are almost unknown to this generation.

Aside from its picturesque beauty, the

only claim of the little hamlet to the notice of the great world outside the valley is the fact that it is a county-seat, and as such has its name printed on the maps in full-faced type. For the same reason the county jail is there. It is a grim gray structure of native granite, neither large nor imposing, but with a claim to distinction nevertheless, for it houses a mystery—The Prisoner.

For over a score of years he has dwelt there, wearing the prison garb, eating the prison food, by day humbly performing the tasks set for him by the warden, by night sleeping without complaint upon the hard cot in his narrow cell.

He is a life prisoner, yet, so far as is known, no jury convicted him of crime; no judge pronounced his sentence; neither the state nor county authorities have any official knowledge of his existence; even the records of the jail itself are silent concerning him. The warden who first received him is dead these many years, and his successors have accepted The Prisoner, as a legacy from the past, not only because of the prestige his presence gives the jail, but on account, also, of his own personality, for

he is a quiet gentle old man, with an ascetic, deeply lined face, and pathetic, introspective eyes that in conversation light with kindly sympathy and understanding.

Beloved by the children, treated with tolerant consideration by the town-folk, and visited by strangers, the number given him by the warden who first received him has long been forgotten and he has become simply The Prisoner; an institution, a mystery, a sort of modern Man in the Iron Mask.

It was in this peaceful community that Walter and James Sargent, sons of Parson Sargent, and Martha, his wife, were born fifty odd years ago and lived, respectively, the first sixteen and seventeen years of their lives.

Then their father and mother died within two months of each other, and the boys, dividing the twelve hundred dollars that was the net result of forty years of patient, unceasing toil, went out into the world to seek their fortunes.

James, the elder, secured a position with a manufacturing concern near New York and, after fifteen years of strict devotion to business, found himself vice-president and managing director of the large corporation.

Walter, always of a studious turn, decided to gratify the ambition of his life, and entered college. The six hundred dollars, which had seemed to him a considerable fortune, did not go far, but by dint of hard work and some assistance from James, he got his degree, and confidently took up his chosen profession of literature.

But fortune refused to smile upon him, and the year that saw James Sargent assume control of a great corporation, found Walter a small salaried reporter on a New York evening paper, holding his position chiefly through his brother's influence with the advertising department.

Walter was not in a cheerful frame of mind one raw drizzling evening as he wearily climbed the dark stairs of his boarding house to his humble back room. For the third time in a week he had fallen down on his story, and the cold, almost contemptuous manner in which his really excellent excuses had been received by the city editor, was very hard to bear.

But he forgot his resentment in surprise

when, on opening his door, he found his brother in the room.

James was standing at the bureau, a silver-framed photograph in his hand, studying the pictured face with rapt attention. He turned as Walter entered, replacing the frame deliberately, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"You look surprised," he remarked, smiling.

"Why not?" laughed Walter, shaking hands cordially. "It's the first time you have favored my lowly lodging. Rather different from your sumptuous quarters," he added, glancing around the cheerless room, but without the slightest trace of bitterness.

"That is one reason I have come," replied James. "Let's sit down, Walter. I want to have a serious talk with you."

In height and build the brothers were much alike, but there all resemblance ceased; James Sargent was the man of affairs, the man accustomed to command and to be obeyed without question. He had fought his way up step by step, and the struggle had lined and hardened his face, drawn tighter the straight, thin lips, grizzled slightly the hair at his temples, and given a touch of intolerance to the expression of his cold, direct eyes. He appeared to be ten years older than he really was.

Walter, on the other hand, looked, if anything, younger than his years. There was a boyish buoyant cheerfulness about him usually, that had kept age at a distance. Yet in spite of the youthful curves and the large, rather introspective eyes, there was nothing weak about his face.

"I've been thinking for some time," began James, when they were seated, "that I haven't played a brotherly part lately, and now that I've got my business affairs on a firm footing, I want to see what can be done for yours.

"No, don't interrupt"—as Walter began to protest, "I'm not going to offer you an allowance, though under the circumstances, you could accept one without injury to your self-respect. I have done well, Walter. I am practically in control of my company and could liquidate my personal holdings for half a million to-morrow; their potential value is ten times that, and if I should die

you would get it all, naturally. My idea is this—you believe you could manage a newspaper if you had a chance; I know of one that is on its last legs and the whole plant can be picked up cheap. It's out in Denver; I'll give you a reasonable salary as managing editor and a free hand. What do you say?"

Walter jumped to his feet and shook his brother's hand enthusiastically.

"Jim," he cried, "you're a brick! I know I can make good on that—and then—then!"

He walked to the bureau, and picked up the silver-framed photograph.

"Walter!"

An odd quality in his brother's tone caused the younger man to turn suddenly. As he met the other's cold eyes, a curious feeling of antagonism, entirely foreign to his nature, took possession of him.

"There is something else I wish to tell you," continued James evenly. "I am going to marry Elinor."

Walter stared at him, his face growing slowly white.

"You are going to marry Elinor," he repeated uncomprehendingly, "you mean you have asked her? She has engaged herself to you?"

James hesitated.

"No—not yet," he replied slowly. "But she will. And why not?" he went on recovering his assurance. "Have you any claim that I have not? When, as a little girl, she used to spend the summers with her grandmother at Newfane, we were equally her attendants; has it been any different since, at almost the same time, we renewed her acquaintance here? You know she has always lived in comparative luxury, but her father's death has altered things materially. I happen to know there is little left, and she has her mother and two young sisters to think of. What have you to offer her? Even with my help—"

Walter set the photograph down and turned toward his brother with eyes in which amazement, dawning understanding, bitter disappointment, and contempt rapidly followed each other.

"Your help!" he repeated with a short laugh, "your help—"

"—it would be years before you would be in a position to support a wife," continued James, ignoring the interruption. "I am a rich man now, and will be richer. If you really love her you will consider her interests as well as your own. I am a good match; you—are not."

For a moment Walter stood staring at his brother.

"I see," he said at last slowly. "You are trying to buy what you cannot win. I am sorry for you, James. Sorry that in learning to make money you have sacrificed your sense of self-respect and decency. But strange as it may seem to you, neither Elinor nor I is for sale. I—I think you had better go," he added harshly, feeling his self-control weakening.

James picked up his hat quietly.

"I am sorry this has come between us, Walter," he replied, "but I am accustomed to facing positions as they are, not as I wish they were. My offer is still open. Think over what I have said."

Left alone, Walter sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. There was truth in what his brother had said, he admitted bitterly, but the sense of his inalienable right as a man to win if he could the woman he loved, without regard to extraneous conditions, was strong within him.

He was furiously angry at, and bitterly disappointed in, James, too. He had always looked up to his brother; having an unselfish pride in his achievements and success and believing him as incapable of anything approaching meanness as he was himself.

What right had James to assume that Elinor would look only on the material side? What right had he to assume that he—Walter—would never succeed in his chosen profession. It was impertinence and worse.

"I will see Elinor at once!" he said aloud. "I've been a fool to let things drift so long."

And without stopping to dress, he caught up his hat and coat, and went out.

Elinor Allington was a charming, if not beautiful, girl, with the vivid coloring, the lithe free grace of movement, and the perfect poise that comes of much out-of-door life and healthful exercise.

Possibly her mouth was a trifle too large, her chin a little too firm and square, and her nose just slightly retroussé, but her eyes, blue-gray, and wide and direct as a child's, more than offset these defects.

For the few moments she kept Walter waiting, he wandered restlessly about the drawing-room, nervously handling various articles, but when at last she came in, smiling a frank pleased welcome, all indecision disappeared, and he took both her hands and held them.

"Elinor," he said abruptly, but very gently, "I have come to tell you that I love you. Will you marry me, dear?"

The girl laughed, and looked up at him, dimpling and blushing.

"Why you funny boy," she began, but the pale drawn face, and the tense eyes stopped her and the smile faded from her lips.

"What has happened, Walter?" she asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Will you marry me?" he repeated. "You know how little I have to offer—but will you?"

For a moment she looked at him gravely, and there was no trace of coyness or coquetry, as she answered softly:

"Yes, Walter."

"You—you love me?" he asked, his face suddenly illumined.

"You should know that, dear," she replied simply, and in his happiness the memory of his brother's visit vanished.

It was not until he was bidding her good night that he remembered and Elinor saw that sudden frown contract his brow.

"Something is worrying you, Walter," she said with a woman's quick divination. "Is—it Jim?"

Walter looked at her in surprise.

"Why—yes," he admitted slowly, "what made you think of him?"

"Has he told you anything?" she asked, answering his question with another.

"Yes," he replied. "But how—"

"I was sorry, Walter," she interrupted, "I was *really* sorry. I didn't want to hurt him for your sake; but, of course, I had to tell him that it was quite impossible. I—I think he suspected there was some one else—though I couldn't tell him that—then."

Walter was looking at her in growing amazement, but they were standing now by the front door, and by the dim hall-light, she did not notice.

"When was this?" he asked.

"Why this afternoon—late," she answered. "I thought you said he told you."

Walter hesitated, but after all Jim was his brother, and he could not tell Elinor of his treachery.

"He did—partially," he answered at last.

"He didn't go into details—but let us forget everything unpleasant, dear—it can't be helped."

Nevertheless he was far from forgetting as he walked quickly down Broadway. Jim must have come directly from Elinor to him. He had tried to buy him off; get him out of his way, knowing that Elinor cared for him. He was working himself into a fine rage, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a hearty voice hailed him.

It was Tom McGrath, star reporter of one of the big dailies, and the best friend he had in the city.

"Heard the news, Walt?" he asked, as Sargent paused.

"Nothing particular," answered Walter absently, his thoughts still on his own troubles.

"You're a hot reporter!" returned McGrath. "Don't know the news of your own family! Haven't you heard about the strike at the Eastern Manufacturing Company's plant? The whole night force, twenty-eight hundred men they say, walked out, an hour after they went on, and the day shift—over three thousand, go to-morrow. Since that brother of yours got control he's been raising particular hob with the wage scale, hours, unions, and everything else. The whole mob—six or seven thousand of them—is out, and out to stay."

Five minutes before Walter would have said that news of this character could cause him only the keenest satisfaction, but in fact it did not.

"If I know anything about Jim," he said, "I'm afraid the plant will fall to pieces before they get back on any terms but his."

"That's all right for *him*," returned McGrath, "but there are *others*, my boy. He's not the whole corporation. It's their

busy season now, and I understand they've got a pile of unfinished contracts on their hands. When the stockholders see money going out like water in a millrace, they'll kick good and plenty."

"Jim's in control, isn't he?"

"Well, yes, nominally. I don't believe he owns a controlling interest, and there's such a thing as a special stockholders' meeting, you know, and proxies can be withdrawn. Brother Jim may find himself out of the vice-presidency and out of the directorate—out of a job altogether perhaps, if things go too far."

Walter laughed unbelievably.

"Oh, trust Jim!" he answered lightly. "He hasn't let much get away from him yet."

McGrath laid his hand on Walter's arm.

"There's another thing," he said seriously. "In fact, I was on my way to tell you. I don't want to worry you unnecessarily, but—well, I've done a good deal of strike work and general labor reporting, and I have a way of finding out things. All I'll say is this, the men out there are particularly bitter against your brother, and some of them are inclined to be reckless. There's a pretty big foreign element, and when the bread is all gone, and nothing but wood alcohol whisky left, the leaders can't always control them. Give him the tip."

Walter went home with much food for thought, and among other things his brother words occurred to him: "If I should die you would get it all, naturally." Before he went to bed he wrote and posted a curt note to James telling him what McGrath had said.

Two weeks later James Sargent sat in his private office at the plant of the Eastern Manufacturing Company, in New Jersey, and looked out over the almost deserted yard.

For fifteen years he had known it, in all its phases, at all hours of the night and day. Always there had been the sharp hiss of steam and the whirr of dynamos; the staccato puffing of the fussy little engines, switching long strings of cars through the yard; the rush and rattle of giant cranes swinging titanic burdens from place to

place; the steady thud of mighty hammers and stamps, and through it all the hoarse cries of men, directing, controlling, adding their puny voices, with the aid of clanging bells and shrill whistles, to the vast pæan of labor.

Now, however, a deadly, ominous silence brooded over everything. The black pall of smoke that by day had obscured the sun and at night had been revealed by sudden blood-red gushes of flame from the many stacks, was gone.

For nearly two weeks he had lived there, sleeping when he could sleep, on a cot by his desk, and eating with the special officers and guards in the Pullman cars that stood on a siding by the big gate.

Those weeks had aged him perceptibly, but his eyes were colder than ever, and his mouth set in a more determined, thin, straight line. There was no sign of weakening or relenting in his bearing, and none but he knew the terrible tension he was living under, or how each day control of his nerves became more difficult.

Not a soul had stuck to him; even the directors and stockholders had turned on him after the first few days, but he had outwitted them, for he had bought out some of the more timid and now had an absolute control. It would take a tedious legal proceeding to oust him now.

At first he had tried to put on other men, but most of his employees were skilled men, hard to find outside the unions, and the few he had been able to secure had been manhandled and sent to the hospital, or frightened away; so he had sat down to starve the strikers out.

But the thing that unnerved him most was the sights he had witnessed; the strikers had been rather more quiet than usual, for they had the sympathy of the public and wished to keep it, but there were a few that even the leaders could not keep in check, and more than once men who had carelessly ventured outside the company's gates had only been rescued from serious injury by a sally of their comrades.

He remembered Tony particularly, the little porter of the office. He was in no way concerned with the strike, but the gang outside the gates cared little for that.

Sargent had seen the whole thing from the window of his office. He had watched the porter start blithely up the road without thought of danger—were not all men his friends? He had seen the sudden rush of the crowd, and in imagination he could see Tony's perennial grin change to a look of surprise and, as he realized their purpose, to terror. Then, even as he turned to run back they swept over him like a pack of wolves over a fallen doe, kicking, stamping, striking—mad with the lust of blood.

It was only a minute before the guards reached him, but the thing they carried to Sargent's office bore little resemblance to humanity.

Once the other side was brought home to him when, as he was leaving the mess car, a wild-eyed disordered woman, evading the guards, dashed through the gates, shrieking in Polish, and threw at his feet the dead body of a child. It needed no autopsy to reveal the cause of death; starvation was written plainly in the pinched face.

"She says you take her man, you take the child, too," translated a man near him. "She's the woman of the Polack you sent up for assault last week."

It was of these things he was thinking—these, and a letter he had that day received from Elinor, when there came a knock at the door and an old man entered. He had been a night watchman, a pensioner practically, before the strike, and had been allowed to remain, being of little value one way or the other.

"Are yer goin' ter try ter git out by th' little gate t'-night?" he asked.

Sargent looked up startled. Very few knew of his intention.

"How did you know that?" he asked sharply.

For answer the old man handed him a crumpled piece of paper.

"It's from me darter," he explained. "She sint it down by little Dick wid me dinner pail." It was short:

Tell the boss not to try to get out by the little gate to-night. Some of the boys is on and will be laying for him to fix him for good.

For some time Sargent stared at it; then he tossed it on his desk and nodded to the old watchman.

"All right," he said shortly. "Much obliged. Here," he added, thrusting a ten-dollar bill into the man's willing palm, "give this to your daughter."

For half an hour after the old man had gone he paced slowly up and down, deep in thought.

Then as though he had suddenly come to a determination, he walked briskly to the telephone.

"I'll fix 'em, damn 'em!" he muttered as he took down the receiver and called up the Associated Press in New York.

"Hello!" he called. "This is Sargent—James Sargent, of the Eastern Manufacturing Company; I wish you would announce for me that this plant is shut down for good—yes, for good. I am going to move the whole thing—lock, stock and barrel—to Vermont. Yes, Vermont. Never mind where—I'll announce that later. Good-by!" And he hung up the receiver.

Sargent waited until the Associated Press had called him and verified the message he had sent, then he deliberately disconnected the wires.

"Now let them howl—the weak-kneed fools!" he growled, and putting on a long fur-lined overcoat and a fur cap, he went out to wander around the deserted yard. It began to snow, and the soft flakes soon covered the grimy buildings with a mantle of white, but Sargent, absorbed in his own bitter thoughts, did not notice it.

It was dark when he finally returned to the office and threw himself wearily on his cot.

But he could not rest, and in a moment he arose, switched on the lights, and fell to pacing the room with short, nervous strides.

A knock at the door aroused him, and two men entered, leading a third.

"Here's a feller as says he's your brother," said one.

"All right. You needn't hold him," snapped Sargent irritably. "He won't hurt me."

"Well?" he asked as the door closed behind the guards.

"In Heaven's name what does that statement you gave out mean, Jim?" cried Walter excitedly.

"Wasn't it plain?" asked James.

"Plain? Yes! But it's raised the devil; the stockholders and directors got together like a flock of frightened sheep."

"Don't the fools know a bluff?"

"Of course, but it has given them the chance they wanted. They say you are crazy—I don't know what they are doing, but they were closeted with a lot of lawyers when I left New York. There's talk of having you committed to an asylum, injunctions, and a dozen other things."

James clenched his hands.

"They wouldn't dare, the curs!" he cried. "I'd—I'd—" he calmed himself with an effort. "I don't know why I discuss my business with you," he said coldly. "If that is all you came for you had better go back—to Elinor. You might be injured here."

Walter looked at him sharply. There was something odd in his tone and manner.

"You have heard?" he asked.

"She wrote me," James answered quietly. "I congratulate you."

He sat back in his chair, staring blankly at the desk before him. A letter lay there and his eye focused upon it automatically. "The little gate. The boys are laying for him to fix him for good." "*To fix him for good.*"

A curious, cunning leer crept into his eyes as he leaned forward, took up the letter of the watchman's daughter and slowly tore it up. Then he turned to Walter with almost effusive frankness.

"Let bygones be bygones," he said. "I'll admit I didn't treat you fairly—but all's fair in love, you know."

Walter took his extended hand and shook it heartily; he was more than willing to forgive.

"But—but the strike?" he asked.

"The strike—oh, the strike!" answered James vaguely. "I'll—I'll give you an interview. Say that the message about moving the plant was sent by some designing person who had access to my office—and here—take this coat and cap"—he picked up his fur overcoat as he spoke—"that thin coat is nothing to wear in a blizzard like this."

In spite of Walter's protests he forced

them upon him, and opening the door, called a guard.

"Take Mr. Sargent to the small gate," he ordered. "It's nearer the village and there are not likely to be any strikers there."

Without another word he closed the door upon them, and with an exclamation of triumph snapped off the lights and went to the window.

For a few moments after the two figures had disappeared in the storm he stood with his face pressed close to the pane; the silence, the soft falling flakes, the white-shrouded buildings, were awakening memories—memories of the old parsonage on the banks of the West River; of the quiet valley; of his father, the old parson; of the patient mother, and her gentle teachings—and suddenly, as if a veil was lifted, he saw his soul in all its nakedness! The depths to which pride of power had dragged him! God! He had sent his brother to his death! A murderer! A fraticide!

He strove to raise the window, but it resisted, and he dashed his clenched fists through the glass. The blood from his cut hands stained the white snow; again and again he cried to Walter to come back; but his voice seemed deadened; turning from the window he rushed madly to the door, but as he reached the head of the stairs there came a muffled report and he stopped as though the bullet had pierced his heart.

Another report followed, and then a fusillade, but he did not hear it, for at the second shot he had plunged head first down the stairs, and lay, a crumpled heap, on the floor.

It was many weeks before James Sargent opened his eyes in consciousness; weeks of delirium, and fearful visions, but when at last he did, the first person he saw was Walter.

"You!" he murmured in a voice scarcely audible from weakness.

"Yes," answered Walter gently, "I'm all here, Jimmy."

The old childhood name brought a light to the sick man's eyes.

"The—shots?" he asked.

"Only some of the boys trying to get over

the wall. The deputies drove them back. The strike is over, Jim. Everything is all right now—you must hurry and get well to take charge again."

Very feebly James shook his head; then, with a sigh, he closed his eyes and slept.

Summer came and went, and in September Elinor and Walter were married. James gave her to his brother at the altar, but when they returned from their wedding trip he had disappeared.

His property he had placed in trust, the income, with the exception of a small amount, to be paid to Walter and his wife.

No one but his lawyer knew where he had gone, and he was bound to silence.

But to the warden of the county jail at Newfane had come one day a prematurely white-haired, white-bearded man, with a strange story. He was, he said, a criminal in intent, although his plan had failed; and he felt that in the eyes of God he was still a criminal and must be punished, therefore he had sentenced himself to life imprisonment, and he prayed the warden to become his jailer.

He seemed a harmless character, and the warden had a good heart, besides which, the old man was willing to pay for his board and do such work as was requested as well.

And that is how The Prisoner came to the Newfane jail.



THE SPIRIT-BOATS

WITHIN the many-chambered tomb
For Tut-ankh-Amen built,
Among the alabaster jars,
The faience and the gilt,
Were placed the spirit-boats designed
To bear his soul away
To happy shores by Horus blest
With everlasting day.

Pink shallows far more fit to hold
Young Loves perfumed and curled
Than navigate the dreary dark
And haunted underworld,
Light fairy vessels that should rock
On waters laced with foam,
By sunny isles or emerald woods
Where Pan was wont to roam.

No doubt the ancient monarch hoped
On blue Egyptian nights
To steer his bark to mundane parts
And taste of old delights,
Between the lotus-lilies drift
Along the star-lit Nile,
And play the sistrum for his queen
While basking in her smile.

Behold! above the dusky hills
The new moon's silver boat
Upon its bright celestial way
Serenely certain float.
Who knows? Marc Antony its course
From sky to earth may guide,
To visit once again the scene
Where Cleopatra died.

Minna Irving.



Graft

By **WOLCOTT LECLÉAR BEARD**

Author of "For the Flag," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DUNNING PLAYS A CARD.

"**J**UMP over there on the grass, so your tracks won't show," whispered Aunt Sophronia. "Now kiss me—quick, Phil—and go—and once more, God be with you!"

The car had started before Phil's feet touched the soft turf. Again, for a mile or so, it went at its former fearful speed. Then, slowing down, it entered a woods road, almost grown over, and stopped, waiting, with lights and engine shut off.

Aunt Sophronia had not long to wait. From the distance there came the sound of motors, rapidly approaching. A moment later two motorcycles whirled by on the main road. A big touring car followed, and by stooping, and so catching it in profile against the sky, she could see that it was

filled with men, and that they had guns. She waited still longer, but there were no more. The pursuit had passed.

Backing the roadster out onto the main highway, Aunt Sophronia drove back to the spot where she had left her limousine.

"Take this other car back to Phelim O'Rourke's," she commanded, addressing her two men. "Drive me there also, and call Phelim out; I want to speak with him."

They did as she told them. Phelim's eyes opened wide as they fell upon her.

"Holy Saint Pathrick!" he cried. "Whatever have ye been doin' to yerself, Miss Sophrony? Faith, and ye're whiter than anny ghost could ever be! Joost wait till—"

"Listen!" she interrupted him. "Phelim, in a little while Phil may write to you—or maybe he'll come to see you. At night, most likely. I don't have to tell you to be

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 17.

good to him; I only wanted to warn you of what might happen. And now, Phelim, do you think you could get me a little glass of blackberry cordial?"

With muttered oaths of wonderment, Phelim dashed into his saloon and in a few seconds came out, bearing a bottle and glass.

"I don't usually believe in taking liquor," Aunt Sophronia explained, guiltily. "But this evening I've been engaged in what you might call legal strategy. And I found it dreadful wearing, Phelim—dreadful!"

Then she drank her thimbleful of cordial. Phelim heaved a sigh.

"I sure belave ye, ma'am," he said.

In no way had Liebler exaggerated the degree of consternation that his news would inject into the high councils of his patrons. In fact, he somewhat underestimated it; for as a mere pawn on the political chessboard he could only guess, but had no means of knowing, how large the disaster would loom before the eyes of his terrified masters.

Dunning, however, had no illusions on this score. By no means lacking in cunning, he realized, perhaps more fully than did any one else, the consequences that Aunt Sophronia's act would probably bring. He had, of course, no proof that the act was hers—but neither, for that matter, had he any doubts. Damn the old woman!

After having expressed his unbiased opinion of Liebler, so far as a few trenchant words, spoken over the telephone, would permit, Dunning called up the Chief of Police and urged him, quite needlessly, to his utmost efforts to apprehend the fugitive. Still using the telephone, he ascertained that Horton was at his club, and thither, as fast as a taxicab could take him, the district attorney repaired. He told Horton the news.

"Still, it may not be as bad as it seems," observed the mayor, desperately clutching at straws of optimism, as Dunning finished. "The police can hardly fail to catch young Herondene at once, and for an untried prisoner to attempt to escape is always a presumption of guilt. You must play that up strong."

"Play it up! Of course, I'll play it up," snapped the district attorney, impatiently. "But hang it, man, can't you see what's happened? This isn't an 'attempted' escape. The man's at large. The devil himself can't tell how long it'll be before he's caught. We can't convict him till he is caught. By convicting him and Ayres we could stand pat on our records—honesty and efficiency—protecting the city and jailing those who'd steal the public money—all that sort of thing. As it is—"

"But can't we do that anyway?" the mayor broke in, still clinging to his straw of hope. "Stand pat on our records, I mean. Seeing that young Herondene has escaped, his position, so far as the public is concerned, is much the same as though he'd been convicted, isn't it? That's the point I was making in the first place."

Dunning snorted scornfully. Always had he felt a contempt for Horton's mind, so much less facile than his own. Previously, through motives of policy, he had been accustomed to conceal that contempt, but now Horton's fatuity fairly angered him out of his habitual reserve.

"For the love of heaven try—just try—to think!" he snarled. "Our safety lies in quick action; this escape has given the other side just the delay it needs. Did you know that all the testimony regarding our characters, which Gruber suppressed, has been put in writing and sworn to, with the intention of publishing the affidavits far and wide? Do you know that their detectives are digging up all manner of other facts, and that these are also to be published? Anyway, it's truth, whether you knew it or not. And just imagine—if you have anything besides reinforced concrete in that head of yours—what this sort of thing will mean to us!"

These particular dangers until now had not been known to Horton. He gasped, as though it had been a bucket of cold water, instead of the information, that had been flung in his face. And as he did so, still another fact occurred to him.

"And Senator Reynolds is due to arrive here at any time now," he added, huskily.

"He is," agreed Dunning. "Not that it'll matter much to us; if a house falls on

one, it doesn't greatly matter whether it has a ton of bricks more or less. The point is this: That old woman, Sophronia Herondene, seems to have nearly all the money there is in the world, and she's dumping it, in carload lots, wherever it will do us the most harm. Without that outflow of her money, the opposition would collapse. And that outflow is what has to be stopped."

"By appeal to Sophronia Herondene?" asked Horton, rallying sufficiently to essay a sneer in his turn. "Is that the way you mean to try and stop her activities? I tried that—once."

"I know you did. You went about it in the wrong way—of course. But just because you made a mess of things, it doesn't follow that I will. And it's I who'll make the next attempt. Old Sophronia is shrewd in her way, but after all, she's only a woman. I'll offer the same compromise you would have offered if little Peggy Herondene hadn't started in to bean you with a broomstick or something. If old Sophronia will accept that compromise—why, well and good. If not—"

He finished his sentence by clenching the fingers of one hand and pointing downward with its extended thumb. Horton turned pale, for it was the gesture that meant only one thing—death.

"Great heavens!" cried Horton, dabbing at his forehead, clammy with cold sweat. "You can't mean—"

"You know well enough what I mean," interrupted Dunning, contemptuously. "And, in one way or another, it goes, if necessary, not only for old Sophronia, but for the whole accursed family. We won't go into details, if the subject frightens you as badly as it seems to do. You stay here; I'm starting now. The old woman ought to be back at the hotel by this time."

Dunning thereupon departed. H's surmise was correct; Aunt Sophronia had returned to her hotel when he reached it. But she had returned only a moment before.

It is hardly to be wondered at that Aunt Sophronia was somewhat overcome by her late exertions. When an elderly lady of New England birth and upbringing, unimpeachable position and hitherto impeccable life suddenly begins to violate the laws of

her country in so active a manner that she is pursued by armed men, some little reaction is inevitable.

In the present instance the homeopathic dose of cordial that she had taken did not seem to have the desired restorative effect, but to Phelim's urgent solicitations that she should repeat the dose she returned an emphatic negative. As an alternative he suggested that she should go to her room and lie down for a while. Therefore, he gave the necessary orders to her chauffeur, and without waiting for permission, climbed resolutely after her into the car, in order that she might not be alone in case of sudden illness during her journey.

Understanding Phelim's motives, Aunt Sophronia made no objections to his company, though she had not the faintest intention of becoming ill, suddenly or otherwise. In order to demonstrate this fact, she sat rigidly upright until the hotel was reached and nimbly descended without assistance.

Mike Kilrannon, waiting in one of the red-plush chairs that adorned the hotel lobby, rose as Aunt Sophronia entered. She beckoned to him, so that he followed her to the desk.

"Did you notice, Mr. Brown," she asked the hotel clerk, "just what time it was when this man came in here and asked for me?"

"It so happens that I did, Miss Herondene," the clerk replied. "He came just as the passengers from the seven forty-eight train arrived. That would make it between five and ten minutes past eight."

With a word of thanks to the clerk, Aunt Sophronia then addressed herself to Kilrannon.

"Michael," said she. "To-morrow morning I want you to go and see Mr. Jack Ayres, who will be at Phelim O'Rourke's. I need a man to look out for some interests of mine out in the Township, and I think the position will be just the thing for you. The pay'll be more than you've been getting. But Mr. Jack will give you the particulars, Michael, for I find that I'm very tired, and so I think I'll go upstairs."

Kilrannon left her, sputtering thanks so enthusiastic as to be somewhat incoherent. Aunt Sophronia sighed with satisfaction, for

she felt that she had successfully completed a necessary task. She had, that is to say, secured both the financial future of the kindly ex-warden and had also established, through Brown, the hotel clerk, a perfectly good alibi, so far as any active participation in Phil's escape was concerned.

She went to the elevators, and sank wearily into the seat of one of the cars. Phelim followed her. As they ascended, she felt for her handkerchief and gave a little exclamation of dismay as she found that it, and the reticule that contained it, were both missing.

"I had it—that little, black bag of mine—when I came to the hotel," said she. "I must have laid it on the desk, when I was talking to Mr. Brown, and forgot to pick it up. There are papers in it that I wouldn't like to lose, Phelim. So won't you just run down and bring it up to me?"

They had left the elevator. Phelim turned. "I'll be back, ma'am, in t'ree-fift's av a second flat," said he, and ran lightly down the stairs.

Phelim's words, of course, were intended rhetorically rather than as a literal statement of his intentions. As a matter of fact, he was gone for a good deal longer than he intended. When he arrived at the desk, an influx of travelers was engaging the clerk's attention and when the wants of these had been attended to, more time was spent in locating the missing reticule, which had been found tucked away for safekeeping and temporarily forgotten.

Thus it happened that Phelim was not on hand when Dunning arrived at Aunt Sophronia's rooms. As the district attorney intended to see her, and, if possible, accomplish his mission, with or without her consent, he did not go to the desk to have his name announced by the house telephone.

The lift which had borne Dunning upward arrived just as Phelim went down the stairs. Aunt Sophronia had entered the living room of her suite, but before she had time to close the door, the district attorney was at her heels. Turning, she faced him, and frowned when she saw who it was. She would have spoken, but raising one hand in a gesture that requested silence, Dunning forestalled her.

"Wait!" said he. "I wish to speak with you, and I think you will hear me, because what I have to say is of life-and-death importance to Phil, your nephew."

Dunning did not mention any importance that his intended communication might have for Aunt Sophronia herself, and in this he was wise. Had he done so the old lady, fatigued as she was, would assuredly have refused to listen, while, on the other hand, his reference to Phil's welfare would have ensured him a hearing had it endangered her life. She allowed him to enter. Seating herself, she waved him to a chair and waited for him to speak.

"I'll be as short as I can can, Miss Herondene," said he, "but even so I will have to use more words than I could wish. Some of those words, moreover, will be of a nature that won't please you, but nevertheless they will be as important as they're unwelcome. To begin with, I may as well state that the fact that your nephew's escape is owing to you is a thing perfectly well known to the authorities."

"If that was true, you wouldn't come here to talk, Wash Dunning; you'd be here with a warrant for my arrest," observed Aunt Sophronia, speaking for the first time. "That was a real silly sort of lie. Pass on to the next—and try to make it a better one."

There was no asperity in the lady's tone; she spoke merely as one states a fact and offers a mild criticism. No attitude could have been less encouraging, but Dunning, in his position, could not afford to be rebuffed easily. Therefore, assuming an air that doubtless was intended to convey the impression of injured and somewhat threatening dignity, he resumed.

"A warrant can be issued at any time, if it is desired," said he. "At present, however, it is not desired. No one desires unnecessarily to add to the misfortunes which already have fallen upon you, Miss Herondene. Quite the contrary. That is why I'm here. The proposition that I am going to bring to your notice should have been made by Horton, the mayor. He came here for that purpose—"

"He didn't come to me," here interposed Aunt Sophronia.

"No," agreed Dunning. "Though his object was the same, he came to see Miss Ayres. I think you know why, Miss Herondene. For years Horton has loved Edith Ayres. For years the one desire of his life has been to make her his wife—or, failing that, to insure her happiness. His passion for her, pure and unselfish as it is, his devotion to her happiness and subordination of all else to that end, is the most wonderful and beautiful thing of its kind I have ever known. It is like the great loves one reads about in old romances. You can't be ignorant of all this. You must have known it."

"I don't know it," returned Aunt Sophronia, dryly. "I don't expect to know it. But I agree with you that it sounds like an old romance. Exactly like one. But where does all this lead? I don't see."

"Where does it lead?" repeated Dunning, in his most impressive manner. "It leads to the one chance left, not only for your nephew, but for the rest of you as well. And I had better say at once, Miss Herondene, that your attitude is by no means what I might wish. You would do well to modify it—to modify it and to listen carefully to what I am about to say."

"My attitude," observed Aunt Sophronia, obviously unimpressed, "isn't supposed to be what you wish, but what I wish. I'll listen, though, if you'll be quick," she added. "Go on; say your say."

In part, perhaps, because he saw that his present course of conduct was unavailing, but in part certainly because his temper was rising, Dunning proceeded materially to change his attitude. Usually this temper of his was held in most rigid restraint; now it clearly was fast breaking all restraints. Apparently this was exactly what Aunt Sophronia desired, for her face fairly beamed as she perceived the district attorney's self-control rapidly slipping away.

"I'll go on, right enough—and you listen, if you know what's best for yourself," he said, insolently. "What I have to say is this. Your nephew, and Ayres also, as soon as they are tried, will be as guilty as the devil himself, so far as the law is concerned, and the law is all that matters to them. When Phil Herondene is retaken—and he's

bound to be retaken soon—the law will send him to the electric chair for murder in the first degree, and Ayres for an accessory. This is beyond the shadow of a doubt. Do you grasp that?"

"I've grasped that from the first," was the quiet reply. "Is that all you have to say?"

"No; I'm here with a proposition—Horton's proposition. I've told you how he stands in regard to Miss Ayres, and it's true, even though you don't believe me. He'd make her happy, even if it came to surrendering her to another man. In proof of that, he makes this offer. Let Phil return, plead guilty and take his sentence. Then Horton will pledge himself, in writing if you like, that as soon as he is elected Governor of this State—and he's bound to be elected if your money doesn't oppose him—his first official act will be to commute the sentences of both Ayres and Herondene, and as soon as the talk has died down a little, to pardon them. Even though the girl may elect to turn him down and stick to Phil—he'll pardon them. Can you beat it?"

"No," answered Aunt Sophronia, shaking her head. "Larry Horton sending you, of all people, to me, with such a proposition, is a thing that's hard to beat."

By no means was Aunt Sophronia's gentle sarcasm lost upon her hearer. If her object was still further to exasperate that overstrained temper, she accomplished it.

"That's the proposition," said he, flushing angrily. "It's the best you'll get. Take it or leave it. But think twice before you turn it down. You'll regret it if you do—regret it bitterly. I warn you—and I know!"

"Oh—you warn me!" said Aunt Sophronia, with a slow smile, her eyes never leaving Dunning's face. "Yet, as I see it, matters stand like this. You can't try Phil until you catch him. In the meantime he's likely to be cleared while you, Horton and a lot more go to jail for the thieves you are. At the very least you'll both lose your jobs—for you haven't a chance for reelection, as you know perfectly. And yet you have the face to come here suggesting to me that I get my Phil to say he's guilty of crimes that he had nothing to do with, and threat-

en me with 'consequences' if I don't make him do it! Consequences! What consequences? Tell me!"

Dunning's temper was almost out of hand, now; yet still he tried despairingly to hold it in check. It was for this reason probably, rather than through any desire for melodramatic effect, that he leaned forward in his seat, and with an impressive forefinger emphasized the words that he hissed through clenched teeth.

"The consequences," said he, "will be that you'll have for enemies certain men who will stop at nothing. That your life, as well as the lives of Phil and Ayres, won't be worth a punched nickel. That the names of those two girls will be dragged in the mud until no decent woman will dare be seen speaking to either—"

Stopping short in his harangue, Dunning sprang to his feet as a door, leading to an adjoining room, which had furtively opened for an inch or two without his perceiving it, now closed with a little slam. From behind it there came the sounds of a slight scuffle and of muffled, beseeching voices, speaking so low that no words could be distinguished. Taking a long stride, Dunning laid his hand on the knob.

"Don't open the door!" called Peggy's voice, from within. "I'm — I'm not dressed."

"Dressed or not," growled Dunning, "you'll come out here and—"

He finished his sentence by pushing at the door. It was not locked; there was no lock on it. Yet it resisted him, because it was held on the farther side. He drew back for a little distance, in order to throw his weight against it. No young girl could have moved more quickly than Aunt Sophronia then moved. Darting to the door, she placed her back against it, and stood facing Dunning.

"If you were silly enough to forget that there were two girls here, who'd be perfectly sure to overhear what you said, that's your fault, Wash Dunning," said she. "You're not going to drag 'em in here, and try to bully 'em. Keep away from this door! Don't you dare come near it—not a step closer, or —"

"Or you'll scream?" hissed Dunning.

"Is that what you'd say? Well, you won't scream while I'm here to choke it off. And I'll see that those girls hold their tongues or—"

Dunning was like a madman now. Indeed, for the moment he actually was a madman. For years he had been the successful go-between chosen by politicians of the most practical sort. During those years his brain had devised and executed more dark and devious plans than he could begin to remember. Yet, when it came to a matter that vitally concerned himself, his anxiety to effect the compromise he offered, and knowing the inexperience of Aunt Sophronia, he had permitted himself to overlook the fact that those two girls would inevitably be near her in her apartment, and, being near her, must inevitably overhear what he had to say. The realization of such a thing was enough to madden any man.

It was a knock at the door that had interrupted him, and this same knock restored a measure of his normal shrewd sanity. Unconsciously he had crouched, his fingers hooked, his attitude that of some beast about to spring. Now he straightened.

"Come in!" called Aunt Sophronia.

It was Phelim who came. From a finger of one great, red paw, incongruously dangled Aunt Sophronia's black-satin reticule. Unheeded, he allowed it to fall, as for an instant he stood, looking from his former mistress to Dunning, and back again. Then, with a threatening lightness remarkable in so burly a man, he moved quickly forward.

"Don' lay hands on him, Phelim," said Aunt Sophronia. "Just tell him to go away, that's all."

With obvious reluctance, Phelim obeyed.

"There are two ways av leavin' this room," said he. "One is by the windy—the other by the door. Take yer ch'ice."

Taking the choice, and also the hint, Dunning departed. Phelim followed him along the carpeted passage, toward the elevators. Save for themselves, and a shabbily clad mechanic who was busied with some electric wiring on a wall, the broad corridor was empty. As Dunning passed, this man stole a glance at him. Phelim caught sight of the profile thus exposed.

"Saints in heaven!" he gasped. "Is the lad crazy?"

"What's that?" demanded Dunning, stopping short.

The quick-witted Irishman stepped truculently forward, concealing, by the interposition of his own great body, the lesser bulk of the mechanic.

"I asked if it's crazy you are, to be gettin' impident wit' Miss Sophrony," he replied. "I was about to say how lucky it was fer you that she ordhered me not to muss you up. Also I wud say that I'm mighty apt to tamper wit' thot ugly face av yours anny second that ye're here. So don't wait fer the lift. Beat it down them stairs—and do ut now!"

So Dunning "beat it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FUGITIVE.

CROUCHING in the riverside bushes, Phil Herondene watched his own swift car, with the dauntless little figure of Aunt Sophronia at the wheel, as it vanished into the darkness around a turn of the road. He heard the staccato reports of the motorcycles, like those of machine guns, as they followed, with their mufflers cut out. Bent low, as he was, he then could see, as Aunt Sophronia shortly afterward saw, the armed men in the pursuing motor car, in silhouette against the sky. He chuckled excitedly at the pursuit. He knew what his car could do. He knew what that little old lady was making it do, and could judge of the pursuer's speed. Never would she be caught at their present gaits.

But how long could she endure the speed at which she fled? To drive an unlighted car over country roads as she was driving was enough to tax the endurance of a professional racing driver. How long could she maintain that speed? Long enough to elude her pursuers, and without disaster to herself? These were the questions which so troubled Phil that for a time he remained in his place of concealment, listening and watching, without attempting to complete his escape.

No crash, like that of an overturned car, reached his ears, however. Moreover, after a little while, one of the motorcycles returned, obviously discouraged.

Superficially regarded, Phil's might not seem to be a very cheerful prospect. There he was, on a desolate spot on the river bank, in black darkness that grew blacker each moment. He was ridiculously attired in misfit feminine garments, and leaving them out of the question, all his worldly possessions consisted of his coat, hanging over his arm, the clothes he was wearing underneath poor Libby's frock, his shoes and a roll of bills which he had every reason to believe—though there was not light enough for him to count them—was woefully insufficient.

Still he was out of prison and that, after all, was the great thing. There had been no time for him to make detailed plans, but, as it seemed to him, his next move obviously should be to remove his person as quickly and inconspicuously as possible from the place where he and the car had parted company.

Removing his feminine habiliments, he wrapped them around a stone and tossed them well out into the river, as Aunt Sophronia had suggested. Sitting down on one stone, he battered his well-made shoes against another, with the object of rendering their appearance less unsuited to the course he was to pursue. In order to suit the rest of his appearance to the same purpose he took off collar and tie. He was about to rub his coat in the dust when the rumble of a freight interrupted his efforts at disguise.

There was a water tank, as Phil knew, a little way down the track, and toward this he ran, stumbling, over the rough path that led in the proper direction; he did not wish to show himself on the track itself. The train passed him, but he arrived as the engine had finished taking on water, in time to throw himself on the brake-beams before the train jerked and started.

Riding the rods is an art to be learned like any other. Phil had not acquired it. What little he knew—and soon he found how little that was—he had learned from stories in the popular magazines and from

fleeting glimpses of tramps nonchalantly surveying the landscape that flitted by as they reclined at ease on the rods beneath the "side-door Pullman." It had appeared to be an easy and simple thing to do. But the appearances of brake-beams are deceptive.

The first jerk of the car, as it started, nearly threw him off. There was nothing to which he could cling that gave him security. Phil never had imagined that air-suction under a moving box car could be so strong. It brought upward from the road-bed such choking clouds of dust that at each breath it seemed to him impossible that he could take another and survive. As the freight train topped the summit of an up-grade and began to run down the far side of the rise, its speed increased until at first small pebbles began to mingle with the dust, stinging his face and hands, and then larger ones, big enough to bruise the exposed parts upon which they struck.

Phil could see nothing—of course. Even were the car standing still it would have been impossible to see at that time, with the darkness increased by the car's overshadowing body. As it was his eyes, naturally and properly, were closed as tightly as eyes can be closed. But before his mind was the vision of those smoothly rumbling wheels, ready to grind him to a red and mussy paste should he for a second relax his hold.

It was to this vision, doubtless, that this security was largely indebted.

The train rumbled on, it seemed to Phil, for ages. At last, however, it clicked over the switch of a siding and came to a jerky and reluctant stop. Cautiously, and with due regard to his cramped limbs, Phil descended from his perch, and more cautiously still he crawled from under the box car.

The time had seemed so long that he feared that dawn had come and might reveal his presence to the train's crew.

This fear, however, Phil soon proved to be unfounded. It was darker than ever. He saw a brakeman's lantern bobbing toward him from the rear of the train. Unable to see in the darkness he stumbled, fell and slid down a few feet. Any sound that his downward progress made was drowned

by the hissing steam of the engine. He lay still, his throat almost choked, as he afterward explained, by his heart, which had jumped into it, and watched the approaching globe of light. To his intense relief it passed on without pause.

As the lantern pursued its way, Phil rose and went forward, his hands before his face to shield them from the bushes which he could not see, but which he fully expected to encounter—and which he promptly did encounter. Slowly, in order to make as little sound as possible, he worked his way through them, to find his feet on the metalled surface of a made road. This was a piece of good luck that he had not counted upon. He had not the faintest notion of where he was, but such a road must lead somewhere. He followed it joyfully. He found, to his surprise, that he had no difficulty in following it; there was a faint glow of light, coming from around a turn that outlined its course ahead of him.

Slowly, and keeping close to the roadside shrubbery, Phil rounded that turn. He saw, some little distance away, a sizzling arc light suspended over the middle of the road. Its light fell upon a mile-post that was also an advertisement. He read the inscription:

3 miles to the Universal Emporium,
89-96 Washington Street.

Phil knew that "emporium." He had known it all his life. It stood, as it had stood ever since his native city was a country village, at the junction of its two principal streets. And here he was, only three miles from it!

Phil looked at his watch. It was only nine o'clock—a few minutes less, if anything. Truly that journey of his had seemed longer than it was, and as for the distance traversed, he had forgotten, until then, how the line made a half loop of the city from one of its sides to a spot just beyond the other.

He looked at the money that Aunt Sophronia had given him; there were exactly seven one-dollar bills. He could do but little with that. In his flight he might earn more by working as a laborer somewhere, but he did not wish to be dependent upon a

course that involved chances such as that. Aunt Sophronia, however, had endeavored to provide for just the present contingency by advising him to get into communication with Phelim O'Rourke, and he now realized that he was considerably nearer to Phelim's place than he had been when he began riding the rods.

He walked along the country road, past many slums, to Phelim's place. Never afterward could he forget his start of fear at sight of the first passers-by. None of them, however, gave him a second glance. The first policeman likewise sent his heart leaping toward his mouth, but equally without cause. Still greater was Phil's trepidation when he reached the saloon, and had to decide the best method of approach.

The political headquarters, in the side room, were still open, and Jack Ayres probably was there; but the thought of appearing before Jack was put aside at once. Jack's surprise might betray his visitor, or at least be so evident as to draw dangerous attention. He peeped through the swinging half-doors of the barroom. It was crowded at this hour, but neither Phelim nor any of the employees whom he knew could be seen. He entered boldly.

Then he caught sight of his reflection in the mirror back of the bar. He saw the face of a coal-heaver on a body clad in garments which, from their appearance, few coal-heavers would deign to wear. Instinctively he looked on each side of him, to see where this scarecrow stood in the flesh. Then he realized that it was indeed himself. He could scarcely believe that less than an hour's ride beneath a freight car could effect so complete a disguise.

He beckoned to a bartender, who came, grinning affably. He was a new man, and probably labored under the delusion that Phil was a laborer in the great Herondene gravel-pits, not far away, whose face, later, would become familiar to him.

"Where's O'Rourke?" asked Phil.

"Gone out," answered the bartender, with a still broader grin. "Phelim's gettin' inter high sassiety lately. I seen him gettin' into the car of ol' Miss Herondene, who come by here awhile ago, and I guess he's gone to her hotel."

"And Denny Clancy?" then asked Phil.

"Gone for the day. Be back t'morra mornin'. What'll yuh have? Suds?"

Phil nodded. The beer was brought him, and for a while he stood, sipping it and trying to form a plan for his next move.

Two young men, engaged in an animated argument, pushed their way to the bar and stood next to Phil. The voice of one attracted his attention. He was sure that he had heard it before, and upon stealing an upward glance into the bar mirror, he found that the speaker was an electrician who had worked under his direction upon the Terminal.

Phil did not greatly fear that there was much danger of this young mechanic recognizing him in his present surroundings and costume, especially as his escape, presumably, was not yet publicly known. But he intended to take no unnecessary chances and turned away.

A satchel, which he recognized as that in which the young electrician carried his tools, met Phil's eye as it rested on the floor, near the brass rail. Phil was struck by an idea. The electrician was deeply engrossed in his discussion. Lifting the satchel of tools, Phil passed out through the swinging doors and vanished around the nearest corner.

A nearby barber's shop afforded him the opportunity of washing his face and hands—which greatly improved their appearance—and also of having his clothes brushed, which improved them very little; their recent experience having reduced them to such a condition that no amount of brushing nor, indeed, any other treatment, could ever restore them to the pale of respectability.

This, however, was by no means an un-mixed evil. His disguise, thus modified, was all the better for the use to which he intended to put it. Money, if he was to continue his flight, he must have, and have at once. There was no use in searching out Aunt Sophronia for the purpose of obtaining it. She had given him all the money she had in hand. Besides, he would have taken great risk and undergone many hardships rather than trouble the dear old lady who had dared so greatly in his behalf.

Phil resolved to go boldly to the hotel in

quest of Phelim. He would at least find Edith and Peggy there and get from them what cash they might have, pending an opportunity to obtain a more substantial sum.

Phil almost hoped that he would fail to find Phelim, because then he would have an excuse for a hurried word with Edith. He fought against this hope, and tried his best not to allow it to influence him in his actions. But it was present in his mind, and he could not entirely prevent it.

Phil took a street car, alighted at the hotel, entered and started to go upstairs. The house detective, a stranger to him, barred his way and asked his business.

"Business!" repeated Phil, impatiently, exhibiting his tool bag as evidence. "Them lights on the fourt' floor—Room 44. Whadda s'pose I come here for? Ain't you people been keepin' the 'phone wires hot till I was routed outer me house an' sent here?"

This, of course, was purely an imaginative tale, but the house detective had no reason to doubt it; it was precisely the sort of thing that had happened many times before and would doubtless continue to happen. Therefore, when he had caused Phil to open the bag, and had seen for himself that it contained the tools of an electrician and not those of a burglar, he made no further objections and dismissed the matter from his mind.

Now, Aunt Sophronia's suite included the rooms on one side of the fourth floor main corridor from numbers 42 to 50. No. 48, as Phil knew, was that of her living room. From within this door came the sound of voices, though whose voices they were he could not tell at once, and did not stop to determine. He assumed, correctly enough, that one of them was that of Aunt Sophronia herself. Phil did not know which of the remaining four doors was that of Peggy's room. He proceeded, therefore, by the only practical method that occurred to him, to find out.

From the time they were children, Phil an unruly boy and Peggy a tiny girl, he always had found a close and trustworthy ally in that "kid sister" of his; and this relationship had continued through the

years. In those days when important business, generally a raid against some neighboring orchard, had necessitated his unauthorized nocturnal absence from home, he was wont to effect his escape by means of a lightning rod; but to reënter was another matter. For this purpose he was accustomed to make a certain signal, whereupon Peggy would open a window and admit him once more to the house.

He made the signal now, on the panel of the nearest door; two light tattoos with his finger nails, a pause and three more. From within he heard sounds of a stifled squeal, a few whispered words and the patter of bare feet on a carpeted floor. Cautiously at first, then joyfully and widely, the door was opened by Peggy, in her nightgown. For the sake of companionship she had gone into Edith's room before the advent of Dunning, in the living room, had virtually confined her there.

Edith, somewhat more conventionally clad in a fluffy negligee, was close behind Peggy. In an instant Phil had been dragged within, and was nearly strangled by two pairs of soft arms.

Then Phil heard Dunning's voice in the adjoining room; heard each word distinctly through the flimsy door. It was toward the end of Dunning's visit, and though those few words, detached from their context, were not entirely intelligible to their new hearer, the tone in which they were uttered spoke for itself.

Phil's warmest partisans never had been rash enough to number excessive self-control among his virtues, especially when a personal affront was offered to him or his. No affront could have been better calculated to destroy his limited supply of discretion than this conduct of Dunning's. He had no fear whatever that Dunning would hasten to give an alarm. He did not intend that Dunning should be in any condition to give an alarm when he, Phil, had finished with him.

Therefore, he made one long step to the intervening door and laying hand on the knob, would have entered the living room. But it is hard to move when two athletic and desperately determined girls actively interfere to prevent, and harder still when

both of those girls are dearly beloved. Therefore, by dint of force and agonized, whispered entreaties, they prevailed, and Phil found himself thrust out into the corridor just as Phelim entered the living room.

Had Phil been gifted by nature with ordinary prudence, which he was not, he would now have retired promptly into the most inconspicuous spot available, there to await a more favorable moment in which to attain his ends. As it was, what little prudence he had already used since his escape had wholly exhausted his slender stock of this most desirable quality. Therefore, he remained in the corridor, close at hand, but nevertheless, influenced by some remnants of ordinary sense, bethought himself to open that bag of tools and pretend to be busy with the wiring of the electric lights.

Thus he had heard Phelim and Dunning as they emerged from Aunt Sophronia's apartment, but by a great effort of will had succeeded in refraining from turning his head, at first, and had therefore escaped recognition until he fancied the danger to be past, and the temptation therefore became too strong to be resisted. Turning, he found himself looking straight into Phelim's eyes. Phelim's astonished exclamation had arrested Dunning's attention, so that, turning, his eyes also had met Phil's, as both Phil and Phelim knew.

Before either could make a move, Dunning was running swiftly down the stairs. There were only three flights for him to descend, and before he had reached the bottom of the second, they could hear his voice raised in a frenzied shriek.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" he yelled. "Murder! Stop thief!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISASTER.

PEGGY had prepared for bed while awaiting Aunt Sophronia's return, largely because there was nothing else to do. Edith had not dressed since her return from the courthouse. The costumes in which they found themselves when Phil appeared, and in which they rushed into the living room the instant Dunning was

induced to leave, were charming, to say the least.

Now that there was immediate necessity for concentration or for action, Aunt Sophronia, looking pitifully white and fragile lay back in an easy chair, too tired to move. Nevertheless, she straightened in her seat as the two girls entered, and all her old decision promptly returned.

"You'd better go to bed, both of you, and get what sleep you can," said she. "We get up very early to-morrow morning and go back home. There's no use in staying here now; for a while, anyway, there'll be no more trial. Phil has escaped."

Edith caught her breath in a quick, shuddering little sigh. Peggy remained silent. Neither spoke, and neither—naturally—showed any surprise at the news. This latter fact caused Aunt Sophronia to glance quickly from one to the other in surprise.

"You knew that Phil was out of prison?" she asked. "How did you know?"

"How could we help knowing?" returned Peggy. "That horrible Dunning man fairly bellowed the news!"

"That's so," admitted Aunt Sophronia. "I forgot that."

At Peggy's quick-witted reply Edith breathed another sigh, this time of relief. Either girl would have sacrificed much to prevent the knowledge of Phil's present danger, so much greater even than it had been before, from reaching that tired old lady when she could do nothing to lessen it. But they themselves did not know how great this danger was, for the cries of Dunning were not audible in Aunt Sophronia's rooms.

Phil himself, at last awake to the danger into which his rashness had plunged him, repented bitterly, now that it was too late. From below, in answer to Dunning's shouts, there came the sounds of running feet, of questions and of the house detective's voice raised angrily in peremptory orders to hush that row, in order that the hotel might not be discredited. Already people were running up the stairs. He sprang forward to a tomahawk fire-axe hung on the wall and was about to wrest it from its brackets, when Phelim drew him away and hurried him to a far end of the passage.

"Whist!" remonstrated the Irishman. "Later, maybe, ye'll have to put up a foight, but this is no toime fer it."

He opened a window, and seeing his object, Phil sprang to its sill and thence to a narrow ledge that ran beneath. There the pintle upon which a shutter had formerly hung afforded him a precarious handhold that enabled him to stand on one side, so as to be invisible except to one who leaned out of the window and turned so as to look along the outer wall, for the opposite buildings all were occupied by business establishments long since closed for the night.

"Stay there!" whispered Phelim, hurriedly. "Stay there till ye freeze or hell freezes—or I call ye in!"

Then he closed the window and walked quickly back to meet those who were mounting the stairs. His whole maneuver had taken so short a time that when they reached the top of the stairs, Dunning and the house detective at their head, Phelim stood there grinning broadly, to receive them.

"Faith, I'd loike well for to know what all the excitement is about," said he. "I heered a yell av 'stop thafe,' but divvle the thafe have I seen, excipt the wan ye fetched wit' yez."

Phelim's allusion to Dunning himself was made plain by a wag of his head in Dunning's direction, but his words were addressed to the house detective, and it was he who replied to them.

"This here lawyer says he just seen young Herondene—him what is bein' tried—who has flew the coop and is in the hotel," said he, in none too friendly a tone to the legal gentleman who had bespoken his services.

"Dotty," commented Phelim, with a look of commiseration at Dunning. "Clean bughouse! His throubles have sent flittermice into his campanile. Is it loikely, think ye, that if Masher Phil had flew the coop, he'd fly here—the firrst place he'd be looked for?"

This speech, made smilingly as it was, evoked a murmur of approval, but Dunning was not to be so easily diverted from his quest. He was, however, rash enough to make a guess and state it as a fact.

"I saw Philip Herondene," he averred, truly enough, "and he's in the rooms of that old aunt of his this very minute. Search them—and do it now!"

"Search Miss Herondene's rooms? Without a warrant?" contemptuously asked the hotel manager, who at this point joined the party. "I guess not!"

The district attorney turned upon the speaker with rage already to break forth, but what he would have said can never be known, for the door of Aunt Sophronia's rooms opened and she herself stood on the threshold.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

The hotel manager explained, with outspoken and sincere apologies. She interrupted him.

"My nephew isn't in these rooms," said she. "To the best of my knowledge and belief he hasn't been and goodness knows I don't think he's likely to be. But wait a minute, to give Miss Ayres and my niece time to prepare to see strangers, you can search the rooms. I'd rather have you search them. Then, maybe, you'll be better able to judge what that man's word stands for."

After the girls had dressed, the unsuccessful search was made. Its failure gave additional weight to Aunt Sophronia's words and tended largely to cast discredit upon Dunning's statement that Phil had been seen anywhere in the hotel, which disbelief was carefully fostered both by the grinning Phelim and by the hotel management.

The subsequent search, made outside Aunt Sophronia's apartment, was therefore perfunctory, fruitless and short. At it was concluded, Dunning sought a telephone booth, whence he called up the chief of police to arrange that a cordon should surround the hotel, while detectives operated in and around it. He himself doggedly refused to leave, despite the smiles and sneers of the lobby loungers. He wandered disconsolately about, internally fuming, and peered suspiciously at everybody and everything that came under his eyes.

When Dunning and the crowd left the corridor from which the Herondene suite opened, Phelim O'Rourke remained there alone. Then the grin faded from his face,

which became haggard to a degree rarely seen, for even his nerves were showing the stress which was laid upon them. He had turned toward the window outside of which Phil was perched when Aunt Sophronia's door again was opened, and Aunt Sophronia herself stood on the threshold.

"Phelim," she demanded, "is Phil in this hotel?"

Anxious to spare her if he could, Phelim hesitated before replying. Her face, already white from fatigue, became paler still.

"I know he's here," said she. "I know you must have hidden him somewhere, or else he'd have been caught when they looked for him. But now these rooms won't be searched again, probably, so they're the safest place. So bring him here, until we can make some plan to get him away."

Phelim did as he was told, and helped Phil back through the window, for owing to the stiffness of his cramped position, he could not have managed it without assistance; his hands, by their continued clutch on that slim and rusty pintle, were almost powerless. For a time he could neither open nor close them.

No time was wasted in reproof of his carelessness; already that carelessness had brought its own punishment and was likely to bring more. So the two devoted girls fell to chafing his hands between theirs, and Aunt Sophronia was busily planning the next move.

"The police will be on the lookout all around this building," said she, musingly. "Dunning has brains enough to see to that. Everybody going in or out will be watched, even a waiter, or a cook, and the delivery boys aren't out this time of day. No, there's no disguise we dare risk. Phelim, do you think—"

The telephone bell interrupted her. She took down the receiver. "Yes, this is Miss Herondene," said she, in answer to the conventional question.

Then she listened, and those in the room, watching her with bated breath, saw a faint tinge of color come into her cheek and a look of relief, but though they listened until, as Peggy afterward remarked, they almost sprained their ears, and though they

could hear a faint croak from the other end of the wire, no word could be distinguished. At length the croaking ceased.

"Good!" cried Aunt Sophronia, in reply. "I don't think I was ever so glad of anything in all my life! You seem to have heard a lot, but there are other things you'll have to know—things I can't tell you over the 'phone. But Phelim—Phelim O'Rourke—can tell you everything, and I'm sending Phelim to you now. So stay where you are till you see him. Afterward come up here; Jack will sleep down there at his headquarters, and you can have his room. All right? I'll send Phelim, then, as soon as I can get Jack's clothes for him to take. Yes, I'll hurry. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver. There was actually a smile on her face as she turned toward the others.

"It's Senator Reynolds," she explained. "He and Dr. Gray, Phelim, are down at the political headquarters in your place. And while I was talking to him, Phelim, a plan came to me. If I could get Phil to those headquarters of yours, do you think you could hide him there for a while?"

"Wance get him into my disthricht, ma'am, an' not all the divvles in hell—I beg parrdon! I mane, that not all the police in the city will iver lay a finger on a hair av his head! But how will we get him there?"

"You heard what I just said," she answered. "I said it on purpose for the police to hear—for they hear everything that's said over any telephone of mine. I said I was going to send Jack's clothes down to him—and so I will send his trunk. It's one of those newfangled wardrobe trunks, with a bulge in the top, so it won't stand upside down. If we can make a hole in it, to let in some air—"

There was no need for her to continue. Phelim gave a subdued whoop of joy.

"An' the head porther here one av the best fr'inds I have in the wurruld!" he cried. "And as for thim holes—just watch me!"

The corridor still was deserted. The bag of electrician's tools still remained on the floor, where Phil had left it. Retrieving this, he selected two long gimlets, one of which he thrust into the hands of each of

the girls. With feverish haste, they began boring air holes through the trunk's sides and top. Phil, after removing the drawers and clothes hangers which were part of its fittings, began to smash and clear away the framework upon which the drawers rested, while Phelim hastened downstairs to interview his friend, the head porter.

A very few minutes sufficed for all these things. Phil crouched in the trunk; Aunt Sophronia closed the two halves and lowered the top. The key was in its lock; she turned it and handed it to Phelim as the latter entered the room.

"The head porter will be roight here, ma'am, bringin' wan of his men, so as to carry the thrunk clane and aisy," said he. "In the meanwhoile, I'll get it out into the hall meself."

He was a powerful man, and it was no difficult task for him to carry that trunk out of the room and set it down near the head of the stairs, which the head porter and an assistant were ascending. He nodded to them and grinned. The head porter nodded and grinned in return.

"Ye'll get it down to me place straight off, Pat?" said Phelim.

"Straight off; a motor truck is waitin'. You can ride along with it if ye like, Phelim, and—hello! What in blazes do *you* want here?"

These disrespectful words were addressed to the district attorney who, with several uniformed policemen at his heels, had followed the two porters, at some distance, up the stairs. He smiled evilly.

"I saw you talking with O'Rourke, here," said he, "so I thought I'd trail along and have a look at the baggage you were going to move."

"Well—there it is—you see it," was the porter's response. "But you'll not see it long. Here, Harry," he added, addressing his assistant. "Catch hold!"

"Not so fast!" cried Dunning; and at a motion from him one of the policemen interposed between the trunk and the two porters. Dunning approached, and as he did so his face lighted.

"I thought so—air holes!" he cried, seeing one of the inexpertly bored gimlet holes. "We've got our man! Here," he added,

turning toward the policemen. "Open this trunk—open it any way you can. The fire axe will do the trick—grab it!"

"Not without a war'nt ye won't!" cried Phelim, stepping forward.

"The responsibility's mine—you do as I say!" called the district attorney, and turning, one of the policemen lifted the axe from its brackets. By a feat of legerdemain that would do credit to a professional conjurer, a stubby, automatic pistol appeared from nowhere in particular, in Phelim's hand.

"Muller," he said to the policeman, speaking very quietly, "as sure as the divvle wears petticoats, just so sure, if ye touch this thrunk, will I shoot yez so full av lead thot it'll take a derrick for to lift yer coffin, bedad!"

The policeman drew back; Phelim had a reputation of meaning what he said, especially on occasions such as this; and such occasions had not been infrequent during his political life. The other policemen hesitated, as policemen met by such conditions always will. By no means did they lack courage, but the knowledge that the intended procedure had not the law to back it rendered them timid.

In vain, therefore, did the district attorney scold and storm; it had the effect only of causing the police to grow sullen. Muller, the one who had taken the axe, handed it to Dunning with exaggerated deference, and told him to use it himself.

Sullen in his turn, Dunning reluctantly changed his tactics. Ordering the police to guard the trunk, and not to allow its removal from the spot where it stood, he departed in order to obtain the necessary warrant which, even at that hour, his official position enabled him to do. Still, he was reluctant to go. Phelim, leaning on the trunk, which supported his armed right hand in a posture convenient for immediate action, was grinning still, but grinning mirthlessly, much as a terrier grins in anticipation of the coming of a rat. The district attorney feared some trick, but no choice was left to him.

Drawing a little away, he called the policemen around him for a few words of whispered instruction. As he did so, Phelim rapped softly on the trunk, to call

the attention of him who crouched within, and then also whispered:

"Hark ye, Masther Phil!" said he. "Ye've hearrd what has happened. I'm about to open this thrunk. It's faced toward the stairs. Do you make a bolt. Get to my place, if ye can—and annyway, may the saints be wit' you!"

He had been unfastening the lock and lifting the lid of the trunk while he spoke. As the last words were uttered, Phil, with elbows and knees braced against its sides from within, dashed its halves open and darted out. For an instant, but for an instant only, Phil's eyes were dazzled by the light, so that he could not see where to run. In that instant the district attorney, his perceptions far more quick than those of the policemen, sprang forward, but only to stumble over the head porter's foot—which may or may not have been thrust forward with that end in view—and fall headlong. The rest shouted. Phelim also shouted, but with derisive laughter. The noise brought Aunt Sophronia and Peggy to their doors in time to see Phil spring down the stairs, touching them only at long intervals, as he made his break for the ground floor, the outdoor air and liberty. No one attempted to stop him on the stairs. He dashed across the lobby before the police who were there had time to oppose him. He reached the front door—and there disaster overtook him.

This disaster did not appear in any form generally recognizable as such. It was embodied in the person of one Mrs. Small, whose fame reached beyond her own immediate circle for the first and last time on this occasion. Being sensitive as to the matter of her bulk, and therefore refusing to step upon a set of competent scales, Mrs. Small's exact weight was not known, but it usually was estimated in terms of tons.

It was this extraordinary being who, just as Phil would have left the hotel, was in the act of entering the door. The door was one of those revolving affairs. Mrs. Small, with considerable difficulty, had wedged herself into one of its four compartments. Great bodies are proverbially said to move slowly, and in this instance the truth of that proverb was made manifest. With frantic en-

ergy, and all his great strength, Phil pushed, but the inertia of that fleshy mountain was not to be overcome by any means such as this. Before he could gain the street two policemen were there awaiting him, and others appeared within. No course was left but surrender.

Seeing this, he made no further attempt to run. To hide his mortification, he even managed to smile at the police who had intercepted his retreat.

"Hands off!" he said. "You've got me; I'll go quietly. But," he added, meditatively, "I always did hate fat women. I wonder why they ever let themselves get that way, anyhow!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FROM THE DEPTHS.

PHIL'S recapture nominally placed the political ring where it had been before his escape. Nominally, but not really. No one knew better than did the leaders of that ring, how precarious their position was. The newspapers and other printing establishments purchased or controlled by Aunt Sophronia through the agency of Jack Ayres daily were becoming an increasing danger. Already they had brought to light many unsavory facts and were constantly exposing more iniquities.

These exposures were having their natural effect. Election was at hand. Even though, in its extremity, money from outside the city was poured into the coffers of the local organization that money would be of no help if it were not used quickly.

Therefore the trial of Phil and Mr. Ayres was resumed instantly, and with an indecent haste and lack of justice that might have characterized the trial of a Puritan divine at the time of the Restoration. Senator Reynolds was present only at its opening and close; it took but a moment for him to comprehend the state of affairs, unprecedented as it was.

"Keep on as you've been going," said he to Jack. "You have done and still are doing all that any man can do—which amounts to exactly nothing, so far as this court is concerned. Convictions are in-

evitable; these scoundrels have the machine in their hands and intend to run it in their own direction as far as it will go. My business now is to see that it goes only for a very short distance."

"Are you going to leave me here alone then, Senator?" asked Jack, in some dismay.

"Yes," was the reply. "I've got to, in order to help. In the meantime, fight to a finish, and make that finish as far distant in point of time as possible—which won't be far at best. But I'm positive that the finish won't be as bad as it may seem. Tell this to that very remarkable woman, your Aunt Sophronia, and keep her from worrying herself into a sick bed if you can. Here's an address that will reach me. Wire me when the finish comes."

So he went. Hard and stubbornly did Jack fight, but uselessly, so far as it affected the case on trial, as both he and the Senator knew he must fight. Taking false courage from the absence of Reynolds, whom he dared not browbeat, Judge Gruber excelled himself. No objection of Jack's was sustained; none of Dunning's, no matter how frivolous, failed to be sustained.

Jack's final plea was embodied in a speech that went far toward establishing his professional reputation. When Gruber summarily cut it short, as he soon did, there were hisses, which the court officers could not check, from all parts of the room, which was packed almost to the point of suffocation, and largely by potentially belligerent spectators not at all in sympathy with the ruling powers.

The case was given to the jury, which convicted, according to previous instructions without leaving the box. The hisses stopped, and a dead silence fell over the court room as the judge rose to pronounce sentence. Every eye in the room was turned upon him. It was noted by all that his own eyes wavered, then looked off into vacancy, and that his cheeks were pale, his forehead glistening with sweat, as he pronounced the doom that undoubtedly had been recently agreed upon, in view of the changed circumstances, between him and those who controlled him.

This was severe beyond what any one,

even those of Gruber's partisans who were not in the secret, had considered possible. One as accessory, one as principal, both prisoners were sentenced to die, and their executions were to be on the coming Friday, then only four days away.

For a moment, after the sentences were pronounced, the silence continued; so great was the surprise that everyone seemed stunned by it. To his own intense disgust, Jack felt the sting of incipient tears in his eyes. A boyish impulse to disguise his feelings in any way impelled him to give utterance to the first thought that came into his head.

"Good lord—and you actually have the face to call this a court of justice!" he exclaimed. "A bunch of piffers, parasites and perjurers! Do you fancy for a second that you can get away with a deal like the one that you've handed us?"

"May I suggest, your honor," cried Dunning, springing to his feet, his voice dominating the growing murmur from the audience, "that an adequate fine, or commitment, or—better still, both—for contempt of court, might induce this alliterative young man to bridle that blackguardly tongue of his—"

"Gruber!" interrupted Jack, now thoroughly roused, "the United States Treasury doesn't contain money enough for a fine that would begin to express my contempt for this alleged court of yours, and all eternity can't afford an adequate period of imprisonment. That's how great my contempt is. Now commit me if you dare!"

For a moment he stood still, apparently awaiting a reply; and some reply was certainly made, for Gruber's lips were seen to move, but whatever he may have said was utterly lost in the uproar that instantly followed Jack's words. Those words were undeniably rash; undeniably without possible justification from a legal point of view. But apparently they expressed what was in the minds of the attendant crowd, which answered with a roar of approval as it surged over the rail.

The police on duty in the court room made no attempt to reach the offending young lawyer. Instead some of them gath-

ered around the judge, to guard him against possible assault while others hurried the prisoners away, in fear of an attempt at rescue. Without stopping for his hat or his papers, Dunning vanished by way of a side door, which he locked after him. Phelim O'Rourke, foremost among those who invaded the space sacred to the court proper, grasped Jack by an arm and whirled him about.

"Get out av this!" he whispered, hoarsely. "Beat it—while the goin's good!"

The advice was excellent, as Jack readily admitted to himself. But even had he not admitted this fact, he would have followed the advice; surrounded, as he found himself to be, by a compact phalanx of Phelim's henchmen, he could not have done otherwise. In some manner that he never quite understood, he found himself sitting beside Phelim, in the latter's flame-colored roadster.

"Home," he said, with a groan, in response to his companion's questioning look. "I've got to go home. I've got to tell 'em—Aunt Sophronia, and Edith, and Peg—what has happened. I'd rather go to the chair myself—but I must! There's no way out of it."

With an instinctive delicacy that one might perhaps not have expected from him, Phelim did not answer. It was not until he stopped at the Herondene door that Phelim spoke.

"Don't you iver think, Masther Jack—an' don't you let Miss Sophrony think—that anny harrm will come to thim two, down there in the jail," said he, earnestly. "Sinator Reynolds will see to thot. But if he shud fail—or if thim blagyard's thry for to slip somethin' over—well, there's men enough—my men, an' Miss Sophrony's men from out there in the Township, an' half the city besoides—what will take that old prison aparrrt—an' the judge an' the disthric attorney an' the police also—befoor the militia cud get together or foire a shot—which in anny case they wudden't do. Tell her so."

By way of reply, Jack extended his hand, which was gripped for an instant in Phelim's huge paw and then let go as the roadster flashed around the oval and back down

the drive. With a heart heavier than it ever had been before, Jack entered the house.

If he most dreaded the breaking of his frightful news to the family, he had at least reason to congratulate himself in this respect, for the news had preceded him. Dr. Gray had been present when the sentence was spoken, and before the subsequent demonstration began, he hastened to the Herondene place, fearful of what the effect of that news might be. He had reason for that fear. Even before he had told it Aunt Sophronia, who had come to meet him, saw it in his face, and for the first time in her life had fainted dead away.

Now, as Jack entered, he came down the stairs, resonantly blowing his nose and looking savagely cross, which was his manner of revealing that he was deeply moved.

"She's conscious," said Dr. Gray. "If it was any one else in the world, I should say that she was in for a real nervous breakdown, after which, with rest and proper care, she—with that wiry strength of hers—would come up all smiling. As it is, I honestly fear that she's going to die, and from nothing in the world but a case of sheer, damned, ingrowing New England conscience, by Jove!"

"Where is she now?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"In bed, of course. In her room. The two girls are with her. She wants to see you. Go on up—and tell her something cheerful, if there's anything of the sort to tell. I'll be up there to chase you out before you've been there too long. I've got to telephone, now."

The doctor bustled into the library, and with his heart heavier, if possible, even than it had been before, Jack went upstairs.

The foot of Aunt Sophronia's huge old-four-poster bed stood toward the open door of her room. In the prairie-like surface of its coverings Aunt Sophronia's tiny form made scarcely a perceptible bulge. Her wizened, bright little face, wofully drawn and haggard now, seemed no larger, as it lay on that huge pillow, than that of a baby.

Edith and Peggy stood at her bedside, their faces full of anxiety. Doubtless act-

ing in accordance with Dr. Gray's orders, both left the room as Jack entered. He stooped, and kissed Aunt Sophronia. She tried to smile up at him in return, but it was not a very successful attempt.

"I'm not sick, dear," she hastened to assure him. "Dr. Gray says I am, and, of course, he ought to know—but I'm not. Not in body, that is. It's thinking that has put me here, flat on my back, as I am. Thinking of the fix that those two are in, and realizing that it's all my fault."

"*Your* fault!" cried Jack. His honest amazement at her extraordinary statement seemed to bring her a grain of comfort, so that her smile was a trifle more spontaneous now.

"Yes," said she. "It's my fault; there's no denying that, I'm afraid. I put my hand to the plow—but looked back. My great-grandfather, Sophronius, said we must fight the devil with fire, if the devil attacked us—and I thought I was, or tried to think so. But I wasn't. Not really. I thought of the word 'fight' in the wrong way—that we had to fight as my great-grandfather used to do. Instead of really fighting—instead of making all this fuss—I ought just to ha' bought the whole thing."

"The whole thing," repeated Jack, fuddled. "You mean—"

"I mean the Governor and the State Legislature and everything else that was necessary," explained Aunt Sophronia. "It didn't occur to me that such conduct was fighting; to me it looked more like surrender, paying tribute to the powers of evil. It looked sneaky. And just on account of my silly scruples, I've failed. Failed utterly. And that's why Phil and Edward Ayres are—where they are!"

She closed her eyes and two tears stole from beneath their lids. To see Aunt Sophronia cry—a phenomenon unique in Jack's experience—and to cry for a reason such as the one she had given, affected him strangely. Cheerfully would he have helped her at any cost, even that of his life, and yet he felt a tender desire to laugh at her. Her self-blame was so like her, and yet so absurd. So characteristic of the "ingrowing New England conscience" of which Dr. Gray had spoken.

"But you haven't failed—not by a long way, yet," Jack stoutly assured her, and went on to repeat what Senator Reynolds had said, and what Phelim had said, dwelling with particular emphasis on the latter message because he saw that as she heard, Aunt Sophronia hastily wiped away her tears and that no more followed them. A faint tinge of color even returned to her cheeks.

"A government of the people, if perverted, can properly be retaken, by force if needs must, into the people's own hands," she quoted. "It was my Great-grandfather Sophronius who said that. He was very wise. And Phelim is a good man. You'd better see about buying some rifles, and dynamite—and cannon, if you can find any—at once. And then the fighting men must be paid, and paid well—and fed. See to that, too."

"It hasn't come to that pass yet," Jack assured her. "I'll see to it in time, however; never fear. In the meantime, Aunt Sophronia, you cheer up—"

"By all means!" interrupted Dr. Gray, entering the room at this moment. "You cheer up, Sophronia—and Jack, you clear out! I've had Reynolds on the long-distance 'phone. He'll be back here, his business all finished—whatever that business may have been—before you know it. In the meantime, as Jack says, take this medicine and then go to sleep."

The doctor's bustling and peremptory cheeriness was not sufficient to effect its purpose. As soon as the momentary stimulus given by Phelim's assurance of strenuous help lost its effect because it was not immediately to be translated into action, Aunt Sophronia's exhausted mind and body relapsed into their former weakness and self-tormenting melancholy. Jack's spirits, forced to a higher pitch than normal on her account, fell correspondingly low as he left the room.

In the corridor outside stood Peggy, and as he saw her, Jack felt a measure of the same sympathetic pity that Aunt Sophronia had inspired. Like most of the Herondene women—and none, strangely enough, of the Herondene men—Peggy was a little thing, and the corridor in which she stood

was so vast as to give her a strangely lost and forlorn appearance. Moreover, Peggy's young face was worn and strained. This could not have come all at once, and vaguely Jack wondered that he had not seen it before. He hoped that Peggy wasn't going to collapse and take to her bed. She was such a nice, game kid!

He said nothing of this to her, however. Instead, he only asked, "Where's Edie?"

"In her room. She braces up and makes good when Aunt Sophronia needs her, but Edith's all in, Jack. We all are tired—and sad, of course."

"Yes," he agreed. "You have reason enough for that. We all have."

"But it's Aunt Sophronia that we mostly are troubled about," Peggy hastily rejoined. "As for Phil and your father—why, this awful position that they're in *must* be set right somehow."

"It will," answered Jack, much as he might have answered Aunt Sophronia, had she used the same words. "It will. If matters come down to brass tacks, we'll see that it does."

"You mean to say that there's a plan—an emergency plan—to be used if everything else falls down?"

"That's what I mean."

"Then come and tell me about it!" she cried, her face brightening. "It'll be the best pick-me-up that the world has to offer, I think. No—not in there," she hastened to say, as Jack headed toward the library. "Nor in either of the drawing-rooms. They're all filled with men—I don't know who they are, but they all look like magnates of some sort, and they're waiting for him to return—and there's a different set in each room. Let's go into the big dining room; it's quiet there."

The room they entered was rarely used save on ceremonial occasions. For ordinary purposes the family preferred a sunny breakfast room on another side of the house. The state dining room, with its elaborate ornamentation, intended to be admired only by artificial light, its vastness and its drawn blinds, seemed very cheerless and cold.

"Let's go," said she, with a little shudder. "It isn't nice in here. I didn't realize what it would be like. The place seems

somehow to be full of ghosts—ghosts of things that have happened—ghosts of what we used to be. It was here I came on that awful night of the dance—don't you remember?—to hide from Aunt Sophy after I had put on Edith's frock—like a great kid, as I was."

"*'As I was!'*" quoted Jack, chaffingly, hoping to bring her into a lighter mood.

"Yes—as I was," answered Peggy, gravely. "I know it was only a little while ago in point of time, but it might as well have been years. It has turned me into a woman, Jack. I may be happy again—I hope I will—but I'll never be a kid any more."

She made no move to leave the room, as she herself had suggested doing. Instead she unconsciously drew a little closer to Jack, as though for protection, and stood staring at the blinded windows. One of her hands found its way into his. It was deathly cold. He slipped an arm around her waist, and drew her to him. She came unresistingly. So he drew her closer still.

"I'll miss the Peggy that I used to know, if she has gone for good," he said, and it seemed strangely difficult for him to make that perfectly straightforward statement, and still more difficult for him to go on. "That Peggy—Peggy the high-school girl," he continued, in a voice so low that it hardly could be heard, "was a bully girl. She used to care for me—or so I hoped—a little, in her own kid way. But this Peggy—I don't know. Has she changed, in that way, as she has in others, Peggy?"

He had drawn her close; now, of her own accord, she moved a little closer still, and shook her head. Her face was hidden in the breast of his coat, and he found that she was crying, quietly. He kissed her. By no means was it the first time he had done so, but about this kiss there seemed to be something that differed from the others, even though in the present instance it fell upon one of her ears, which was the only point available. She drew away, blushing furiously.

"Don't!" she retreated as he approached. "It seems wicked—as things are—and, oh, Jack!"

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked,

in alarm, for her last words were uttered in a breathless gasp, and her eyes, round as though with terror, were fixed, as they had been fixed when first she entered the room, upon the windows at its other end. For a moment she remained motionless, without answering him.

"What's wrong?" he demanded again. "Are you ill, Peggy—or do you see something?"

"Do I see?" she cried. "Yes!"

As she turned toward him he saw that her eyes were sparkling, and that her whole face shone, as it seemed to him, as though from a light shining outward from within.

"I said there were ghosts in here—ghosts of things that have happened," she went on. "I see one of those ghosts now—in my mind, of course, but as clearly as when I stood here in Edith's frock, watching that man whom I saw there at the window, looking for some one outside. Couldn't it be Jimmy Wilson that he was looking for? Isn't it likely that he was—or some confederate of his? And if we could find the man who stood there by the window, isn't it likely that we could find Jimmy, as well?"

She jumped up and down, clapping her hands, as she always had done when excited and pleased.

"But when you saw this man you didn't recognize him," objected Jack. "So far as you're aware, you never laid eyes on him except for that one occasion. How can we find him, then? We've been trying all along to do that, but we got nowhere."

"But that was because we didn't stop to think," cried Peggy. "Look!"

She ran lightly along the length of the dining room and stopped at one of the windows.

"He—the man I saw that night—was standing here, like this," said she, turning her back upon Jack and speaking over her shoulder. "He had a napkin over one arm, like a waiter, as I said, and both his hands were resting one on each side of the window casing. I'm sure that no one can have touched those casings since—hardly any one has been here—but even if they have, there ought to be some of the finger-prints left. And look, Jack—look! There are!—you can see them!"

She had raised the shades while speaking, allowing the sun to stream in. Now she stood to one side in order to see the places where she said that the man's fingers had rested from a direction that made an acute angle with that of the sun's rays. Jack also looked. The finger-prints were plain for any one to see; tiny streaks of convolute iridescence, serried in small patches on the dark mahogany of the casing.

"By Jove, I believe you've struck it!" cried Jack, now almost as excited as Peggy herself. "At worst you've come closer to a clew than any one else has succeeded in doing. What on earth ever put such ideas into your head?"

"Wait!" she commanded, without answering him. "I'll be back in a minute."

She ran away, and not in a minute to be sure, but within the space of a few minutes, returned, bringing in one hand a little camera of hers, while her other hand bore a sheet of note paper and a can of talcum powder.

"I know all about finger-prints," she remarked, setting down the camera. "I read it all in a magazine."

Jack chuckled at her air of importance. Jack stood aside and watched her, but did not interfere. Shaking some powder from the can into the sheet of paper, with a quick puff of her breath Peggy blew it in a cloud against the finger-prints on one side of the window. Some of it stuck, defining in white the lines of what had been iridescence and allowing the rest of the powder to drift downward like a tiny snowstorm.

How to set the camera for a little puzzled her; no ordinary tripod would hold it high enough. Three chairs, one under each leg, solved that problem, however. The exposures were made, several of them for each set of finger-prints.

"Never mind trying to develop these things," said Jack. "I'll get a car out. We'll rush 'em right down to the *Courier* office, where they can be developed, enlarged and printed in jig time and all at once."

"But after that!" cried Peggy, in dismay. "What'll we do with them then? I never thought of that—and we can't go around stopping people on the streets, and

comparing their fingers with those prints, until we strike the right man. What can we do?"

"Compare 'em with the finger-prints at Police Headquarters," answered Jack. "The man is most likely a crook, who has had his finger-prints taken there. If not—well, we'll think up something else, that's all. But we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I'll get the car; you get your lid, Peggy, and let's beat it down to the *Courier* office."

As stealthily as though they were on some errand of crime, in order that their news might not reach Aunt Sophronia until it proved itself to be worthy of telling, they whirled away to the office of the *Courier*. There they waited with what little patience they could command for the enlarged prints to be finished. But though their patience might be small, their spirits were high, because they had high hopes to ride upon.

Peggy's eyes were very bright, her cheeks pink, and both were exceedingly becoming to Peggy. When the city editor, in person, scenting the possibility of a story, came to see these representatives of his paper's owner, she flirted with him unblushingly; a proceeding to which he was in no way averse, and which amused Jack enormously.

No flirtation, however, could for long side-track the city editor's professional instincts. Even while flirting with Peggy he managed to draw from her a hint of the mission that brought her there, and then all other considerations were instantly relegated far to the background.

"But how are you going to get at those finger-print records at Police Headquarters, Ayres?" he objected. "The people there aren't likely to go out of their way to do you a favor; that's one sure thing. You'd better let me handle this. I'll give the enlarged photographs—they're ready now—to our lawyer. His offices are next door, and the police have nothing against him. We can save no end of time, that way."

This plan was far too good to meet anything but ready agreement on Jack's part. The photographs therefore were despatched—and then he and Peggy waited. It was hard work—that waiting. Desperately hard work. To Peggy especially, unused as

she was to this sort of thing, it was almost maddening.

Her nerves strained almost to the breaking point, Peggy nervously paced the room. Knowing her of old, Jack had the deep discernment to leave her alone in her present mood. There followed a long period of waiting before the city editor reappeared, and in a state of excitement such as city editors rarely permit themselves to show.

"It just has been telephoned from Police Headquarters that the finger-prints are those of John Dugan, *alias* James Wilson," he announced, with breathless haste. "He was accused of larceny and committed for trial in default of a thousand dollars bail. But don't go, Ayres. Something big—something that concerns you—is about to break. I don't know what—not yet. But you wait!

He vanished. The door slammed behind him, and once more Peggy and Jack were left alone. Suddenly, then most unexpectedly and utterly without warning, she flung herself upon Jack and began to cry as though her heart would break.

"No," she stammered, between her sobs, as he tried to comfort her, "—I—lemme alone! I'm just h—happy. That's all. Jimmy's f—f—found. I'm so sure that ev—everything will be all right that I d—don't feel wuw-wicked to be happy any more."

So Jack laughed, and kissed her—not on the ear, this time. They became so oblivious to all else happening in the universe that they were recalled to a realization of such things only when a door was flung violently open. Springing apart, and turning as they did so, they beheld an office boy, fiery-haired and freckled, who grinned upon them from the open portal.

"Gee!" he remarked. "Yuh needn't mind *me*. But dere's some udder guys what'll be here in a minute. Say, but dere won't be no story in dis old rag—oh, no! It's Senator Reynolds what's comin', and some high-toned cops from Washin'ton, an' a lot more. Dey're bringin' Jimmy Wilson—an' say! Them Washin'ton cops has pinched de mayor an' de district attorney! It's straight! Now whadda yer know about dat!"

He vanished, but hardly had the door closed when it reopened sufficiently to allow the red head once more to appear.

"Say!" grinned this head, in a husky and confidential whisper that carried farther than some shouts would have done. "Say! Dem guys won't be here for ten minutes yet. You'll have dat much time by yer lonesomes, anyhow."

Again the head vanished, this time permanently. Jack glanced at Peggy, to find, much to his surprise, that though her cheeks were crimson with blushes, she was laughing.

"Do you know," she said, turning to Jack, "I kind of like that boy. He's a good kid!"

CHAPTER XXX.

CONSEQUENCES.

JIMMY WILSON was the first of the newcomers, of whose advent the red-headed office boy had given warning, to arrive. He came alone, sidling into the door and looking into the faces of the two occupants, Jack and Peggy, with an expression on his face that might have been that of an ill-treated dog hoping for the best, but fearing another brickbat, or more kicks.

Jimmy's shirt, originally of startling hues, and his trousers and waistcoat of loud plaid, were filthy beyond description. He had no coat. His face was pale, his eyes red. In one hand he held a handkerchief, no cleaner than the remainder of his clothing, wadded up in a damp ball. His utter misery would have aroused sympathy on the part of almost any one, and these two young people, especially at this time, were far from being hard-hearted. Besides, Peggy had known the lad all her life. Both started forward in greeting.

"Why, Jimmy," cried the girl, "we've been looking for you everywhere! We had no idea where you were."

"I know, Miss Peggy," answered Jimmy, his face hardening vindictively. "They tol' me all about it, down there to the jail. And I told 'em all I knowed, an' swore to it. And I hope it sends this Horton guy to—say, Miss Peggy, d'yuh know they never

told me—that I never knowed a word about *her*—till now?"

"Her?" repeated Jack, for a moment puzzled. "You mean—"

"I mean ma—me mother. They kep' me alone—by myself—so I didn't know nothin' outside er that five-by-six rathole. They wanted me to swear I seen Master Phil fire the shot what killed Spike Creach. They'd cooked up a whole yarn, and writ it down. They wanted me to swear to it—to frame Master Phil. They guessed that it was me what had fired that shot. They told me that if I didn't swear it on somebody else, I'd go to the chair meself."

"Who is 'they?'" asked Jack.

"Dunning. Horton. It was Horton who mostly talked with me. I guess Dunning wanted to slide out from under if there should be a comeback, an' maybe they thought I'd fall for a mayor quicker'n I would fer a jitney-graftin' shyster like Dunning. Anyway 'twas Horton talked to me. He gimme these clo'es, an' some money. I didn't know—not then—that Master Phil had been pinched for the shootin'. As soon's I hear, I beat it up to ol' Peter's shanty with a note I'd written. But Peter's dump caught fire, and I lost me coat tryin' to put it out. The note got burned up, I s'pose, and I hadn't no chance to write another."

"You hadn't!" exclaimed Peggy. "Why didn't you?"

"Why didn't I?" echoed Jimmy. "'Cause they pinched me—pinched me for swipin' the clo'es an' the money what Horton, he gives me! They run me into the cooler, where I stay ever since. But the note wouldn't ha' done no good, the lawyers tells me. I say in it that Master Phil didn't fire that shot, but I wasn't sayin' who did fire it—not then."

"Then you knew who did fire that shot?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Jimmy, soberly. "Sure I know. I seen her do it. It was ma."

"Your mother!" cried Jack, aghast.

"Not Libby!" added Peggy, doubtful of her own ears. "It couldn't be Libby!"

"Yes," repeated Jimmy. "It was her, all right. It was for me she done it. She thinks I was gettin' into a bad way—and I

was. She knows I used for to hang 'round Spike Creach. I'd been pinched once before. Spike, he never had much truck with me; I didn't trot in his class. But ma, she was most bughouse about him. Had a notion that Spike hadn't nothin' else to do only to learn me the burglar's trade. Once she found a gun on me, an' copped it. That settled the whole thing. She thought he was a-gonter learn me to murder as well as steal."

"But your mother knew that you were to be there to help the caterer, that night of the dance," objected Peggy, still unable to believe. "She couldn't have thought that you had come there—to our house—to steal."

"I guess she did think so," murmured Jimmy, doggedly. "And she wasn't so far wrong at that. I'd framed it up with another guy. But he didn't come; I watched for him, but he never showed up. I had put it up to Spike, but he turned me down. I don't know why. I don't know why he was there. But when I go to look for the other guy—I got outer the dinin'-room winda—and go an' look into the lib'ry, I see Spike. An' I seen ma come close to the other door an' fire the shot—outer my gun."

"And then?" asked a strange voice, as Jimmy paused.

The voice was that of a reporter of the paper, one of several who had stolen in while Jimmy was speaking. So engrossed had they been—Peggy, Jack and Jimmy himself, that none of them had noticed the coming of these strangers. Jack and Peggy started, but Jimmy, still noticing nothing, went on.

"Then I beat it, and the cops what was stationed out there on the lawn gathered me in, but later Dunning made 'em let me go, an' took me to Horton's place—his house. Dunning had seen me through the winda, though I didn't know it till he tol' me. That finishes all I know. I've come clean. I couldn't do it no sooner—I couldn't get ma in bad. I *couldn't*. I'd give me ears if she hadn't done it. But she did. An' she done it for me. And the doin' of it killed her. But I didn't know that till jus' now, like I said."

Jimmy mopped his eyes again. For a

moment there was silence; then Jack strode over and took Jimmy's hand.

"You've come clean, Jimmy—you've done all you can to make good," said he. "I'm very much mistaken if you don't have a fair chance from now on."

"So am I," added Peggy, decidedly.

She might have spoken further—probably she would, but the sound of voices, approaching the door, made her sit back and turn white. Jack saw this and looked at her questioningly, but without result, for her eyes were fixed upon the door that the voices and footsteps were nearing. One voice—the dominant one for the moment—was easily recognized. It was that of Dunning.

"Oh, I know when I'm licked," he was saying, with an attempt at cynical bravado. "I'll turn state's evidence, all right; I'll cough up everything I know, from the very bottom of my immortal soul—if I have such a thing."

"It's rather to be doubted," was the dry comment, in Senator Reynolds's voice. "It also is rather to be doubted whether your turning state's evidence will be of very much avail. It isn't only the federal warrant, concerning the misspent money for the new post office that you have to answer for. It's the State affairs, as well. And every one of your little friends, from Gruber down through Feelin to the last grafting sub-contractor, is trying to save his skin at the expense of the rest."

Senator Reynolds was a friend of Peggy's, a friend of such long standing that she had sat on his knee at a time when she could hardly have sat upright on the floor unassisted by pillows. His daughter was one of her school chums. She knew him for a kindly, jolly and exceedingly indulgent parent of his own and a sort of brevet uncle of all other children of his acquaintance.

Yet now there was something in his voice—something hard and cold, vindictive and cynical—that made her shudder. It made her pity that trapped jackal, Dunning, himself feebly attempting to present an aspect of cynicism as he flaunted his disgrace, accomplished and impending. It caused her to feel a more reluctant pity for Horton, whose voice was not heard, but who was

present, and whose desperate unhappiness she could more readily picture to herself because she knew him better. For Peggy could not bear to behold unhappiness, just then. She turned to Jack.

"Take me home," she begged. "Please take me home!"

"The best possible place for you!" concurred Jack, and to this the city editor, who had just reëntered, nodded hearty assent.

The city editor opened a door that led from the room in which Peggy and Jack had been sitting. This was a species of large board room, nominally sacred to the use of the company's directors, and the door led thence into the city editor's own domain.

With Jack close behind her, Peggy would have hurried through, but in her path there was a group of men attracted by the unprecedented sensation—copy readers, rewrite men and the like, whose places were properly elsewhere—and this detained her. Therefore, though she did not see the party that entered the board room, she could not help but hear Senator Reynolds, when he spoke again.

"Sit down!" ordered the Senator; and then, when the scraping of the chairs subsided, he went on.

"I've sent for all you men, from every paper in the city," said he, "because I want you to hear what I have to say and also the tale that your precious district attorney is going to tell. I want you to get it all and get it straight. To begin with, I wish to announce that the Governor offered to pardon both Mr. Ayres and Mr. Herondene. But they won't accept pardons, because they're not guilty. Their indictments must be quashed, or else—"

"Look out! Stop him! Quick!"

It was three different voices that uttered these cries practically at the same instant. There followed a rush of feet and a confusion of other cries. Stepping backward, Jack took a hurried peep into the room he just had left. The city editor darted by him, in a moment to return and begin forcing a passage for Peggy through the crowd that now, in its anxiety to see into the room, impeded her more than ever. A faint odor, as of peaches, hung heavily in the air. Jack caught the editor's eye.

"Horton?" he asked, behind Peggy's back.

He did not speak the word; only shaped it with his lips. The editor nodded.

"Dead?" then asked Jack, in the same way.

Another nod.

"Cyanide?"

The city editor nodded for a third time.

The passage was open now, and Jack hurried Peggy through, and out of the city room.

"What was that scuffle back there?" she asked, listlessly, as they went down the single flight of stairs. "Somebody trying to escape?"

"Yes," he answered, after an instant of hesitation. It was true, and there was no use in going into ghastly details just then.

"Who was it?" Peggy went on to ask.

"Horton, I believe."

They had reached the street by this time. Peggy sighed.

"I almost wish he had succeeded," said she. "I hate to have anybody unhappy—anyway, on this day. How good the fresh air tastes!"

He assented, and packing her carefully into the roadster, started on their homeward way. They did not speak again until the journey was almost at an end.

"Shall we tell her—Aunt Sophronia—right away, about us?"

"Sure thing!" answered Jack, trying hard to conceal inward trepidation under an off-hand manner. "There's nothing to be gained by waiting that I can see."

"What d' you think she'll say?"

During the drive Jack had been giving practically his entire mind to this question, but he did not consider it worth while to say so.

"Oh, I suppose she'll be surprised. I'm afraid she'll want to put us off because we're so young—or rather, because you are. Maybe she'll scold a bit. But I don't believe that she'll object on any grounds other than our youth. I hope not, anyway."

"She can't," asserted Peggy, with conviction, as the roadster came to a stand. "And do you know," she added, thoughtfully, jumping to the stepping block, "I've

got a sort of hunch that she won't object at all."

Most fervently Jack trusted that Peggy's "hunch" might prove correct. Anyway, they soon would know; Jack believed in having unpleasant matters, such as a visit to the dentist or the like, over with as soon as might be.

Together, therefore, he and Peggy went upstairs to Aunt Sophronia's room. As they went, three facts became manifest; that Aunt Sophronia was in her room, that she was not asleep and that the good news concerning Phil and Mr. Ayres already had reached her, presumably by telephone. From within her apartment there issued the sounds of something that closely resembled a squabble, carried on—anxiously peevish on his part, cheerily, but impatiently decisive on hers—between Aunt Sophronia and Dr. Gray.

"What nonsense!" she was saying. "Weren't you just tellin' me that both Phil and Edith needed a long rest and change of scene? Then hasn't there got to be a wedding, right away? And do you suppose that weddings are arranged by lying in bed and thinking about 'em? Don't be silly!"

It was at this moment that Jack and Peggy, hand in hand, appeared in the open doorway. Something in their faces must have told their story. At any rate Aunt Sophronia asked no questions. She was sitting up in bed. As she saw them, an expression of perfect joy spread over her as she held out both arms to them.

"You children—you blessed children!" she cried. "You've done as Phil and Edith have done—and as Edward Ayres and I hoped you'd do from the time you were born!"

They kissed her, and were kissed. She hugged them, an arm around each; then, pushing them gently away, turned once more toward the doctor.

"I tell you I'm not sick," said she. "What in the world have I got to make me sick? Go out of the room—all of you; I want to get up."

Dr. Gray gave up. There was no help for it. They all left the room, and closed the door behind them. Yet Aunt Sophronia did not at once rise, but instead took from under her pillow a leather-bound manuscript book—the book of old Sophronius. Searching its yellowed leaves with accustomed fingers she found a passage and read it aloud, though to herself.

"When, successfully or Otherwise, one hath Concluded a Fight, it is best that one should put both the Fight and the late Antagonists out of one's Mind as soon as it can be Accomplished. For thus will one not only preserve Happiness, but also conserve Strength, to the end that one may fight the Better when next the Occasion ariseth."

Sighing, Aunt Sophronia shook her head in never-failing admiration.

"He was very wise!" said she.

Then she hurried from her bed, to prepare for the task of which she had spoken.

THE END



L I F E

(There are no perfect days!)

UNDER mischievous stars
Pile our troubles in batches:
When we have some cigars
We are minus the matches.

And when we have matches,
Dame Destiny jars
Our plans into patches—
We have no cigars!

Olin Lyman.



Spirits of the Storm

By JAMES C. YOUNG

"WELL, Dick, we got through, and they said it couldn't be done." The big man in the broad hat descended from the two-horse sleigh drawn up before the Turnerville Hotel, half hidden by the swirl of snow. He swung his arms vigorously, to warm himself, then turned to the sleigh.

"Come on, old fellow," he called, "let's get inside. This is worse than Montana."

A second man uncurled from beneath the robes. The horses fretted at the reins, sensing the end of a hard journey and anxious to reach the warm stable.

"I'm frozen, Jim," said the second man, "but we must get these guns."

They rustled under the tarpaulin on the back of the sleigh and brought forth a pair of rifles and their kits. Then the door of the hotel was opened and a voice called, as though far away:

"Who's there?"

"Two of us, and hungry as wolves."

The man on the porch came down the steps, shielding his eyes with one hand to keep away the driving snow.

"How'd you get through?" he asked. "I wouldn't 'a' thought anybuddy could come up that road."

Then he recognized the driver, and heard how the party had been all day on the way, a twelve-mile drive from the railroad.

The two men left him to bring the luggage and went inside.

"My, but it's good to get out of that storm!" said the one who answered to the name of Dick. "A three-day snow is something the Berkshires seldom have in deer week. We deserve a shot at a big buck after all this trouble."

"Oh, we'll get one—that is, if you have any deer around here," replied his companion. "This snow will slow them down, and if it holds up to-night their trail will be plain as a path. Why, I remember in Montana last winter—"

While he was telling the details the two men warmed themselves before the blaze in an old-fashioned fireplace, filling the room with the pleasant odor of burning wood.

Both were foreign to their surroundings. Jim—otherwise James Buchanan, Montana rancher—was big of body and heavy of voice. His face bore the tan of the open, and he had the easy movements of powerful strength, a man accustomed to do things with his hands.

Richard Harmsworth, New York banker,

and well-known figure in "big business," had lived well and grown a trifle portly in the living. He looked the man of affairs, with decisive ways, one who pushed a button and started great forces.

The hotel keeper came in, bringing their luggage, and placed it at one side.

"Must have had a hard trip," he remarked. "Ain't seen such a snow as this in ten years."

"The worst I remember," agreed Harmsworth. "Thought we'd find a crowd here for deer week."

The hotel keeper shook his head dejectedly. He was a weedy little man, with watery blue eyes and a straw-colored mustache which drooped at the ends. As a matter of habit, he carried his head on one side and looked suspiciously from under his brows.

"We ought to have a crowd," he answered; "but this storm will ruin my business. Just think of it snowing three whole days! And I've been waiting ever since summer for deer week. But I guess it's the Lord's will!"

"Well, stir us up some dinner," cut in Buchanan. "Have many deer been seen?"

"Why, there were a few trails down the valley, across the lake. But this snow—"

He broke off and left them, shaking his head. Dark had added its pall to the storm raging about the building.

"Queer old customer, our host," observed Buchanan, lighting his pipe. "Regular money grubber, I suppose."

"Probably," agreed Harmsworth; "but I guess this storm will hit him pretty hard. The last time I was here—and that's long ago—we slept six in a room, though I'd engaged one in advance. But if the snow holds up I think we will strike a fresh trail early to-morrow."

They continued discussing the country and the shooting, with dark settling outside the storm-swept house. Everything about them bespoke age. The chairs were old, the seats recaned in country fashion. The floor was uncovered save for a rag rug here and there. On the mantelpiece stood bits of old china, an ancient vase, and a clock which ticked loudly in the still room. It was a clean, bare room, suggestive of

scrupulous economy and painstaking cleanliness.

"I guess you can eat now," said the hotel keeper, putting his head through the half-opened door to the rear. "You can just come in here."

For a few minutes nothing was to be heard except the rattle of knives and forks on dishes and the sound of hungry men eating.

"These beans are fine," remarked Buchanan, helping himself a second time. "Best I ever tasted."

"Yes; they would go well with a big steak," answered the banker.

The hotel man, coming in from the kitchen, overheard him.

"We don't get many steaks up here," he said a little caustically. "This ain't New York."

"Of course not, Mr.— By the way, I didn't get your name."

"Hanks is my name—Silas Hanks."

He went into the kitchen again, shaking his head.

Buchanan looked at Harmsworth, and remarked:

"Sour old cuss, isn't he? No milk of human kindness about him."

"Yes, he looks hard; but this is a hard country, Jim. I suppose a man is bound to be somewhat like the atmosphere he lives in."

"You bet he is, Dick. Even you haven't escaped New York. It has changed you."

"Changed me? How have I changed, Jim?"

"Well, I don't know. It's been a good many years since we got together, and I have been looking forward to a holiday in the East with you mighty keen. On the train I was thinking of that last day we saw each other. We hadn't been out of school very long, and you were full of ideas about building bridges and railways, spanning the whole continent with steel. Now—well, I don't know, Dick—you talk in millions, and the other fellow seems to be building the bridges."

"But I built my share. Don't forget that. It just happens that I have—well, graduated, you know."

When the last of the beans had disap-

peared they went back to the fire. Silas came in with the hired man and pointed to the guest's baggage.

"Take that upstairs to the two front rooms," he instructed, and added a little scornfully, "I guess they will want to sleep in different beds."

Then he said to his guests:

"It's lucky you didn't come when deer week was open weather, or you might have had to sleep on the floor."

Both men laughed.

"Pardner, I've slept on the ground so many nights that the floor always seems like a luxury to me," said Buchanan. "Out Montana way we prefer a saddle for a pillow any time."

Silas merely grunted, and started to help the hired man. It was the latter who said:

"I saw Tom Marsh's boy, and he said they were afraid Aunt Maggie might have frozen in this spell. Nobuddy's been able to get through to her house since the storm started, and she so feeble she can hardly make a fire. No telling what has happened to her."

"That so?" questioned Silas. "It's a shame her folks let that old woman live alone off there, with no one to help her. Like as not she is frozen by now, and no mistake."

"Frozen?" questioned Harmsworth. "Can't something be done?"

The hired man shook his head.

"Nobuddy could get through," he said. "It's two miles over the north road, the worst you ever saw. A couple of sleighs tried to travel that way yesterday, and they had to come back. No, sir, nobuddy could get to her house on a rough night like this."

"But she can't be left to freeze," said Buchanan. "There must be some way."

"No, there ain't no way," Silas affirmed. "But mebbe she's all right, though she's eighty and kind of feeble. And I guess she ain't got any of her favorite remedy, either—Dr. Miles's rheumatism cure. She has been taking it for twenty years, I guess. And she was expecting a couple of bottles by mail, but they ain't come. That's a good remedy, too. I take some of it myself."

"Does it cure your rheumatism?" asked Buchanan, the suggestion of a twinkle in his eye.

"It ain't cured yet, but I don't have so many pains. Aunt Maggie says it is the only thing that has kept her alive. She takes it regular, and I hope she has a little left. I've only got a dose or two myself, and I'm saving that for a bad day."

Then Silas and the hired man removed the baggage, leaving the two guests before the fire with feet extended toward the blazing logs. They lay back in their chairs, watching the flickering light from the wood playing about the room.

Outside, the storm still growled and rattled at the windows.

Buchanan reached into the embers and extracted one with a glowing end, which he touched to his pipe, then passed it on to Harmsworth.

"Eighty years old, and nobody to build her a fire," he remarked. "That seems like a little more than one old woman should have to bear."

"Yes; but I suppose it would be impossible to reach her place on such a night," answered Harmsworth. "The road must be impassable now, with the snow still falling. There is a chance, no doubt, that some of her neighbors will reach the house."

Buchanan replied in a monosyllable, and both men looked long into the flames, watching the little castles and the fairy maidens appear and disappear in the embers.

Once more the talk turned to the expected hunt. Silas came back, but gave them small comfort.

"Never had such a storm since I was a boy," he said; "and it deer week, too."

"I suppose we can't do much to-morrow unless it holds up," suggested Harmsworth. "It would be hard work finding a trail in such weather."

"Can't be done," declared Silas in his comforting way. "A trail would be covered before any deer had gone a hundred yards. I'm going to bed myself. If you want to stay up a while there's plenty of wood, though you needn't burn it all. And there's a lamp for each of you on the

table. Take the two front rooms. I guess you'll have cover enough."

"All right, Mr. Hanks—we'll make out," said Harmsworth. "And if this snow stops before morning, please call us early—about four o'clock."

"There ain't no chance, but I'll remember;" and the hotel keeper left them.

It was not long before the two men followed him. They found their rooms, each bare as the one below, with wooden beds covered by many home-made quilts.

"Dick, don't you want to throw this bearskin coat of mine over your bed?" asked Buchanan. "I won't need it, and you are not so accustomed to this kind of living."

But the banker refused, and both men slipped beneath the covers, to escape the chill. Harmsworth found himself dreamily thinking of a railroad he was going to build, then of the deer he hoped to get. He was just dropping into slumber when another thought intruded. Aunt Maggie—eighty years old—without a fire.

The thought made him restless. He recalled his own mother. What if she had ever needed a fire? He turned over and tried to make himself comfortable. All of the comfort seemed gone from the bed. Again his mind took up the thread. Of course it was not positively known that the storm had brought distress to Aunt Maggie; it was only supposition. He tried to picture her sitting before a cozy fire.

And with the habit of decision Harmsworth put away the world's cares until he dropped to sleep. The snow still fell, and the wind kept up its chill chorus across the Berkshire hills, bleak in the grip of merciless winter. Everything which lived and had a home kept close to its hearth.

Harmsworth slept warm and well until an uneasy spirit brought him back to half consciousness. He rose in bed and looked about uncertainly. Had the snow stopped, and Silas called him? He listened, but the house was wrapped in silence. Then Aunt Maggie returned to his mind with a suddenness which brought him to full wakefulness.

The hired man had said that it was two miles to her house, at the crossroads. He

should have offered the man a good sum to break through and see that Aunt Maggie was all right. But the man had been too pessimistic. Harmsworth dismissed him as impossible.

Probably he might get through himself, with Buchanan to aid. He listened and heard the steady breathing of a man asleep. Something had to be done. It was impossible to lie in comfort and think of one old woman freezing in a lonely cottage cut off from the world.

He found a match on the table, scratched it softly, and lighted the lamp. Then he cast the covers aside and put one bare foot on the floor. It was icy cold and made his teeth chatter. Then he swung his arms a moment and dressed. He could see his breath in a cloud of steam by the lamp's yellow glow. It was devilish cold, penetrating, killing.

Going to the pile of baggage in the corner, Harmsworth found a pair of hip boots, a heavy coat, a cap with earflaps, and woolen gloves. And last of all he brought forth a small flask, with a bit of brandy at the bottom. It was a tempting moment. He drew the cork, hesitated, returned it, and put the flask in his pocket. The real emergency was ahead.

Harmsworth opened the bedroom door, went down the creaking stairs on tiptoe, and to the front door. It was locked. He tried the window, and a moment later had raised the sash. The wind whipped the snow inside. But he got out, pulled the window down, and went around to the front of the hotel.

Two miles, the hired man had said, up the north road. He bent his head and started. The snow reached above his knees and he had not gone far until it was above his waist. Then he floundered about and reached the road again. On he went, head down, facing the wind.

The cold ate through his heavy garments, his hands and feet stiffened. But he pushed ahead at a steady, plodding step which carried him to the top of a hill and down the opposite side.

The road grew narrower, the way more difficult. Harmsworth stopped and tried to look about him. The hiss of the falling

snow, swept in giddy eddies by the wind, was the only thing to be seen or heard. He went on a little way, and found the going harder.

Then his engineering sense suggested to him that he was off the route. He faced about and saw his tracks already beginning to fill with snow, and so retraced his steps. And presently he reached the main road again, which turned here at an angle. He had stumbled into a farm lane and just missed getting lost.

Harmsworth bent his head and proceeded, an immeasurable distance, the cold turning him numb. He kept count of the hills, and when he had passed a third decided that he must have traveled a mile. That encouraged him. He was halfway. He took out his watch and tried to read its face, but could not. To attempt striking a match would be useless. He thought of the brandy in his pocket. There was small comfort in the thought. The bottle was almost empty. Worse need might lie ahead.

Once he fell into a drift, and had difficult work getting out. But he kept steadily to the task. He must have been on the way an hour and a half, perhaps two. It could not be much farther now. He wondered if he had passed the crossroads in the dark. But he had kept such careful watch it did not seem possible.

Then he saw a light in the distance. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, fearing it might be an illusion, a hope born of the mind. But as he went on the light grew brighter, just a tiny point of flame in the enveloping blackness. Another hundred feet and an eddy of the snow, swept aside by the wind, revealed a cottage, little more than a shanty, set in the forks of the road. His heart lightened. He had come through, had fulfilled this unexpected duty. Now for the rest of it.

A little search had led him to the old gate in the half-fallen fence. He swung its creaking hinges inward, went up the path, and onto the low porch. Next he found the door and rapped. In a moment he heard a footstep, a slow, halting step, and his heart jumped. Aunt Maggie was up, able to move. He would explain how anxious they had been about her, and see if

there was anything he could do. Then he would go back, or maybe he had best stay till morning.

The steps stopped before the door. He heard a bar removed, the door was opened, and a figure appeared, carrying a lamp. The banker looked with astonishment into the equally astonished face of Silas Hanks. They stood without words for perhaps a minute; then Hanks asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"Why, I couldn't sleep, and came to see if I could help Aunt Maggie. Somebody had to do it, and I didn't know you intended to come."

The hotel man dropped back a step.

"Well, come in; maybe you can help," he said. "I don't know. But I'd never expected to see you here, 'cause I didn't think you'd care about an old woman."

A little touched, Harmsworth answered: "And I didn't expect to see you, Hanks. Of all the men on earth I would have thought you'd be the last to come on this kind of an errand. But let's not argue. How is Aunt Maggie?"

"Poorly, poorly; she may be dead. I pried open a window and found her just about frozen. And I tried to give her some of Dr. Miles's rheumatism cure, but she wouldn't swallow it."

He handed Harmsworth the lamp, closed and barred the door, and the two men stepped from the entryway into a living room, on one side, to the right. It was almost as cold there as outdoors. Harmsworth looked at the fireplace and saw that Silas had been whittling a few splinters, trying to start a fire.

"Where is Aunt Maggie?" he asked.

"In the next room—there, behind," Silas nodded, and went on with his whittling.

"Let's see if we can't do something for her."

"There ain't nothing that can be done until I get this fire started and try to heat water; at least, melt some snow."

"Let's try, anyhow," argued Harmsworth, and led the way into the room at the rear, carrying the lamp.

It was a room stricken by poverty, with only a piece or two of furniture, and a

tumbledown bed in the corner. Harmsworth went toward the bed, holding the lamp over his head so as to see better. Its light showed him the face of a woman, a very old woman, wrinkled and worn by time. She lay like one dead, with eyes closed and mouth just open. He leaned over, and his hand touched the covers, pitifully few and thin. Instantly he threw off his topcoat and spread it over the bed. Silas brought his own coat from the other room, and the two of them together made a better covering.

Harmsworth remembered the brandy, and took the flask from his pocket.

"Get me a spoon," he directed.

Silas found one. "There ain't no use," he insisted; "I tried to give her the rheumatism remedy, but she couldn't swallow it. I think she's dead, and I guess her relatives will be glad of it; then they can get what little she has left."

Harmsworth poured a spoonful of the brandy from the flask and put it into Aunt Maggie's mouth. He tilted it upward, and the contents slipped down her throat. Anxiously the two men waited. The worn face remained impassive. Again Harmsworth filled the spoon, and once more they waited to see if Aunt Maggie moved. But she was still and inert. Only another spoonful of the brandy was left to them. Harmsworth made a last attempt. And this time the throat moved convulsively, the lips tightened and closed.

"Quick, man; she's alive!" cried Harmsworth. "We must get her circulation started."

He began chafing her wrists, Silas helping him. But Harmsworth sent the hotel keeper to start the fire, and in a few minutes heard the blaze crackling. Then Silas unbarred the door again and went out on the porch, returning with a kettleful of snow. Soon he had the water boiling, and Harmsworth stopped his ministrations long enough to look about for such home remedies as might be in the house.

They found a bit of mustard on a shelf and prepared a bath for her feet. Then the two tenderly drew back the covers from Aunt Maggie's wasted frame, and attended her with reverent hands. She sighed a lit-

tle. Perhaps no one had done such a thing for her before. And in a few moments she was breathing more easily. Harmsworth listened, and said to Hanks:

"Her heart's doing a lot better. I think we have saved her." Then he listened again and whispered "Asleep," and the two tipped back into the other room.

There they stood before the hearth, silent. The blaze had become a glowing fire, and its pleasant warmth began to reduce the chill in the air. Harmsworth fumbled in his pockets a moment and brought out pipe and tobacco. Silas produced a corn-cob of ancient lineage, and the two exchanged a light, still silent. Outside the storm swirled on, sighing about the house as though it were an animate spirit. The wood sputtered and purred on the hearth, sending dancing shadows into remote corners, its light etching the men's faces out of the dark background. Silas glanced up and saw that Harmsworth was watching him.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that mebbe I'd been mistaken about you. I wouldn't 'a' thought that you'd do anything for anybuddy, with your city ways and big talk about the things you'd done. I guess I was wrong. You must be a pretty good sort of a man, after all. But I see that big friend of yours didn't come. No—he wouldn't, for sure. Them big fellows is generally all bluff. It was a tough job. There ain't many even in these Berkshire hills that could have found the way to-night, or who could 'a' got through if they had. How'd you do it?"

"The same way you did, Silas. I set my teeth and kept coming; but you beat me. And you are wrong about Buchanan. He is not the sort who stays behind. He'd have come in a minute if I had asked him; but I didn't think there was any need of two taking the chance."

"You shouldn't have done it," agreed Silas. "It wasn't so hard for me. I knew the road and all that. But it was mighty fine of you to try it. And I don't think your big friend could have done, Montana or no Montana. He's not the sort. You didn't need any asking. That's the thing that counted. I— What's that?"

Both listened. Only the sough of the wind answered them.

"Nothing, I guess," said Harmsworth. "Must have been the wind."

"Well, mebbe it was, but—"

Faintly a cry reached them—or was it merely the spirits of the storm, whining their complaint across a wintry world? The two stood, with craned heads, listening; and they heard the sound again. By common consent both moved to the door, took down the bar, and stepped forth into

the whirl of white beating on the porch. Behind them the door gaped open, a square of mellow light from within penetrating the storm. Immediately there was another cry—surely a hail—a big, strong voice rising above the wind in a resounding "Hello!"

And the next instant a big form was coming up the walk, through the white gloom, and to the steps. And Silas and Harmsworth looked into the eyes of Buchanan, and each one understood, all in his own way.



A SPRINGTIME DREAM

MY blood begins to tingle
For my fishin'-rod and hook;
I seem to hear the trickle
And the babble of the brook.

I dream of splashin' fin talk
Every fountain that I pass,
When the trees begin a makin'
Lacy shadows on the grass.

I can smell the woodsy violet,
I can feel the moist earth swish,
As in memory I go trampin'
To the place I used to fish.

I can hear the bullfrog croakin'
And the lark's note high and clear;
And the squirrels upward scamper
To the highest branch in fear.

I can feel the old impatience,
As I found it hard to wait
While I fitted out my fishin'-line
And sorted out my bait.

I can feel my light rod tremble,
As my bobber sinks from sight;
I can feel the thrill of conflict
As my pole bends with the fight.

How I grip my rod and hold it,
How I jerk it in my play,
As those lacy shadows whisper:
"Aw, you have to work to-day!"

E. G. Fox.



Twist the Cup and the Lip

By M. M. SOLOMON

DAWSON sighed complacently and propped his feet on the desk before him. Leaning back he gave himself up to pleasant reflections. He had scarcely settled when there came a firm rap at the door. As he did not stir the knock was repeated vigorously.

At the languid "Come in" the door opened and a young man entered. The newcomer was a stranger to Dawson, who mentally sized him up as a prospective customer. Characteristic of Dawson, he made no mistake in his calculation.

"I believe you're Mr. Dawson?" asked the young man, advancing and holding out his hand.

"That's me," nodded Dawson, shaking hands. "What can I do for you?"

"A great deal I hope," was the smiling answer. "Stanton is my name. Howard Stanton. I represent the Langley Motor Company; doubtless you've heard of them. I understand that you own quite a bit of land around here. I am looking for a favorable site for an assembly plant, preferably in this immediate section. I was referred to you as one who probably would have something to offer us. We are very anxious to secure a location as soon as pos-

sible. We're hoping to begin actual construction within the next thirty days."

As the representative of the Langley Company spoke Dawson regarded him steadily. Did he have anything to offer? Well, rather. Instantly he recalled half a dozen locations he would gladly have sold long ago for a mere pittance. However, he shook his head slowly at Stanton.

"Well, I don't exactly know," he said after a time. "If you had been here sooner I might have been able to do something for you. As it is now, I've about closed a deal with a concern for almost everything I own around here. It's some kind of a manufacturing business, and their representative told me they would employ over a thousand men. Said they wanted to put up five or six plants. In fact, they want all the land they can get."

His keen eye saw the look of disappointment spread over the visitor's face. He chuckled inwardly, though he looked at Stanton seriously. Had his words about closing a deal for all his land been true, Stanton would never have found George Dawson in the little town of Winchester. For years he had been looking anxiously for an opportunity to dispose of his prop-

erty, which was practically worthless other than yielding a scant supply of grass for his cattle. He could have shouted with joy at Stanton's words about purchasing a site for a plant, though his crafty mind was actively at work the moment the young man made his mission known.

Dawson was generally known as a man among men with reference to his astute business ability. Many deals of a shady hue had been credited him, though he always managed to stay within the law and was willing to place his cards face up on the table at any time. Many a poor sucker had parted with good dollars by transacting business with him. But at the showdown no one could fasten a single violation of the law on him, and in the end the affair would be dropped.

"You mean you haven't anything to offer?" asked Stanton, plainly disappointed.

Dawson nodded. "I don't know of a single thing," he returned thoughtfully. "You see, the fellow has an option on everything I own around here and I am expecting him back in a few days to close the deal. Promised to come to-morrow. I wouldn't be surprised to get a wire any minute that he's coming with the money."

"You don't mind showing me around anyway, do you?" asked Stanton. "It's certainly a keen disappointment to come all the way here and find I'm too late by only a matter of several days. It won't do any harm to let me see what I've missed."

"Not a bit," was the brisk reply. "I'll show you everything covered by their option."

They left the office and after several minutes coaxing Dawson's ancient automobile rattled off. Dawson kept up a rapid fire conversation about the wonderful possibilities the new concern would open up to the town and waxed eloquent as they approached the outskirts of his property.

"That's the first lot," he said, waving to the left. "Starts right here off the road and runs clear back to the river. Sixty acres. Level as a billiard table and just suited for their needs. Enough water in that stream to furnish lots of power."

The Langley representative was visibly impressed and Dawson's hopes went sky-

ward. In rapid succession he showed four sites, each of which, he casually remarked, was covered by the "option just granted." A few moments later he pointed ahead.

"There's a piece of land worth a fortune to any man. Especially to a business like yours. Level as a prairie and only half a mile from the railroad." As he drew to a stop at the spot indicated Stanton half rose from the seat and gazed about enthusiastically.

"The very thing!" he exclaimed. "No need to show me anything else. And this is covered by the option also?"

Dawson shook his head affirmatively. "Yes. You see, as I told you, the fellow that called on me seemed anxious to get everything I own. I tried to hold this place here out, but he wouldn't agree. So I had to meet his demands or lose the whole thing. I'm sorry, young fellow, but you're too late."

"But isn't there a chance to do something?" persisted Stanton. "You might be able to get his people to release this particular spot. Why, Mr. Dawson, it's the very thing I've been looking for. Isn't there something we might do?" His voice was filled with something akin to pleading as he spoke, and he looked eagerly at Dawson for some sign of encouragement.

The latter drew a stubby pipe from his pocket, filled it leisurely, applied a match and began to puff furiously. For several minutes he did not respond, looking silently over the property which appealed so strongly to the Langley representative.

"Well, I don't know," he said finally. "Business is business you know. Still, there might be a chance some way. But I'm afraid it won't do any good."

Stanton looked at him quickly. "What won't do any good?"

"I was thinking about the people that hold the option," was the slow answer. "Their man promised to come back to-morrow and give me definite information."

"Tell you what I'll do," he continued in a more animated tone. "When their man comes back I'll try to get this place released. That is, if you're sure your people will agree with your decision."

"I assure you that they will," said Stan-

ton earnestly. "It's up to me entirely; what I say goes. If I decide to buy here they'll accept without a word. I've been with the Langley people for ten years, and during that time have purchased sites for half a dozen plants. Don't worry about their refusing to back me up. Just give me half a chance and I'll close like a flash. What will you take for an option on this place? Three thousand dollars be enough?"

Dawson turned away to swallow a lump which threatened to choke him. "Can't say," he returned. "It depends on what I'm able to do with the other people. Let me see them and then I'll be able to talk with you better."

"And their man is to see you to-morrow?" asked Stanton.

"That's what he said," nodded Dawson. "Tell you what. You come down to my office to-morrow night. I might be able to turn the trick, but as I said, I'm afraid they won't release me."

The thirty minutes' drive back to town ended with Stanton anxiously reminding Dawson that he would be on hand promptly the following evening. The latter managed to hold a straight face until he was safe within his office. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

At the appointed hour the next evening Stanton entered Dawson's office.

"Anything happened?" he asked eagerly.

Dawson nodded. "It has and it hasn't. It depends on you."

The young man looked at him in surprise. "Depends on me? If anything is up to me that will enable the Langley Company to get that property you'll find me ready and willing. What do you mean?"

"Just this," replied Dawson. "The fellow I told you about came to see me this afternoon and, after a long argument, I managed to convince him that his people could do without the place you want."

"You did?" broke in Stanton excitedly.

"Yes," returned Dawson. "Now, it's like this. They gave me twenty thousand dollars for the entire option covering most of my property. And when I offered to buy back that particular site he wanted five thousand dollars. I closed with him and am ready to talk business with you. That

was all right with you, wasn't it?" He looked anxiously at the Langley man.

"Perfectly satisfactory," replied Stanton instantly. "I'm leaving to-night for headquarters and would like very much to take the option back with me. Can you fix up the papers by then?"

"They're ready now," said Dawson, opening a drawer and producing an envelope. "Here you are. All drawn up and ready for signatures."

He laid the paper before Stanton, who glanced over it casually, then reached into his pocket and drew out a folder. Before Dawson's bulging eyes he counted off five thousand dollars and tossed the bills carelessly on the table. "There you are," he said. "Money talks. Let's get it over with. I'd like to get back to the hotel and catch the eight fifteen train." Reaching for his watch he rose.

Dawson's hands closed over the money greedily and after counting the bills to satisfy himself, he turned to Stanton.

"Just as you say, Mr. Stanton," he said heartily. "We'll go over to Henry Royal's office and wind up the deal. He's a lawyer and notary public."

Fifteen minutes later the two emerged from the lawyer's place. Dawson's face was wreathed in smiles and the Langley representative seemed equally pleased as they shook hands at the door.

"Well good-by for the present," said Stanton. "I'm certainly delighted to get an option on what I call the most desirable location I've seen yet. I won't be gone over a week at the longest. And when I return I expect to bring the president of the company along and close the deal."

"All right, young fellow," was the reply. "I must say you will get one of the most valuable pieces of property I own around here. And it's not the money alone that pleases me. It's the feeling I have for this town. I want to watch it grow in a commercial way. We'll be mighty glad to see you people open up here."

II.

IN a small town the size of Winchester, the appearance of a stranger created quite

a stir. The news that such a person was present and had called on George Dawson soon reached old man Hopkins's store, the favorite gathering place of those whose daily life seemed a combination of tobacco chewing, whittling and ideas of how to conduct the affairs of state properly.

"I tell you another sucker is about to gain wisdom at the expense of good dollars," drawled Hopkins as he shifted his quid and missed the sawdust box with a stream of amber colored juice.

"An' that ain't the funny part," he continued. "I went over to the hotel and Stokes told me that the fellow's name was Stanton and he had something to do with an automobile business. He didn't know what he was doing here, but said he spent all his time with Dawson. And when I went over a little later this man Stanton was gone and another fellow was asking about George."

The eyes of his hearers opened in surprise at this statement.

"Yep," he affirmed at the questioning looks. "Said he wanted to buy a lot of land around here. Introduced himself to all of us. Said his name was Dugan, representing a large lumber concern."

"Here comes George now," spoke up a bewhiskered individual, and all eyes followed his gesture.

Dawson entered the store and nodded to his fellow citizens. Dropping a coin on the counter he called for his favorite brand of tobacco.

"I say, George," spoke up Hopkins as he started to leave, "seems that you are having a lot of company lately."

"How's that, Hop?" and Dawson paused at the door.

The storekeeper came from behind the counter, dropped down on a box and spat at the stove, which responded with a hissing sizz.

"Wal," he continued, "there was a sprightly little fellow around here for a couple of days and he seemed mighty interested in your company."

Dawson laughed heartily. "Oh, that was an old friend of mine," he said lightly. "Just dropped in for a short visit and to attend to a little personal business."

"That's all right," persisted Hopkins. "But who is the other fellow?"

Dawson looked at him sharply. "Other fellow?"

Hopkins nodded. "Yes—other fellow. I happened to be at the hotel when he asked about you. Said he was a lumberman or something like that."

Dawson's forehead wrinkled into a frown as he regarded the proprietor steadily.

"And he asked about me?"

"He asked Stokes for a man named George Dawson."

"And he was a lumberman?"

Hopkins nodded slowly. "That's what he said. Haven't you met him or know anything about him?"

"Can't say that I know anything about him," returned Dawson. "But if he wants to see me I'll be at my office."

As he left the store all eyes followed him until he turned the corner, walking hurriedly.

"I won't say for certain," spoke up Hopkins, "but I'd come mighty near betting that something is up around here."

"An' that ain't all," he continued as the others nodded in assent. "If there is something in the wind George Dawson is going to increase his bank account when the show-down comes off."

III.

WHEN Dawson entered his office a short, heavy set stranger rose to greet him. The former took in his visitor at a glance from his expensive velour hat to the pearl spats which adorned his patent leather shoes.

"How are you, Mr. Dawson?" The caller extended a limp hand that suggested a cold, clammy fish.

"Pretty good," Dawson returned "What can I do for you?"

"Sell me some property," was the prompt reply. "Dugan is my name. R. S. Dugan. I'd like to purchase several hundred acres around here."

Dawson looked at him a moment without speaking. "You'd like to buy some land, eh?" he asked slowly.

"Exactly," was the brisk reply. "If we can come to terms I'll establish one of the largest lumber concerns in this section right

here in Winchester. I am president of it and I'm anxious to get busy; time is precious. What have you to offer, and how many acres?"

"I guess you'll want to pay in cash." There was a trace of sarcasm in his voice as a vague suspicion began to enter his mind.

"Indeed I'll pay cash," returned Dugan without a moment's hesitation. "That is, of course, if you have anything that appeals to me.

"And I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Dawson," he continued. "To prove that I mean business, I'll give you five hundred dollars as part payment to bind any trade we might arrange." Reaching into his pocket, he dug up a roll of bills. Peeling one off, he threw it on the table. Dawson's eyes opened in amazement as he saw the denomination of the bill.

"One thousand dollars!" he breathed. An instant later he smiled and turned to Dugan, his whole countenance beaming.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Dugan," he assured him. "It isn't necessary that you pay me a single penny until we come to some kind of an agreement. Of course, I'll be glad to show you around. It will be a pleasure. Just a moment and I'll get my coat."

He disappeared into the next room and returned shortly. "I'm ready now," he said. At his invitation, however, Dugan did not seem anxious to depart. Instead, he crossed his knee, drew a cigar from a pocket and casually applied a match.

"Let's not hurry," he suggested. "In the first place I would like to know just how much land you have for sale. Also I would like to pay you the five hundred dollars before we leave. I want to bind the trade, because, as I stated a moment ago, I mean business from the jump. Let's attend to that first." He motioned to the bill on the table.

"Well, if you insist I'll agree," said Dawson. He turned to a small safe in the corner and knelt on the floor. A moment later he swung the door open and pulled out a drawer containing the five thousand dollars paid him by Stanton of the Langley Company. Selecting five bills of one hundred

dollars each he turned to Dugan with a smile.

The smile ended abruptly. Dawson seemed thunderstruck. Dugan had thrown back his coat, displaying an officer's badge. His eyes were drawn to a fine line, fixed intently on the other man's face. For a moment silence prevailed. It was the officer who finally broke the deathlike stillness.

"George Dawson, you are under arrest for having counterfeit money in your possession! I've landed you with the goods!" He rose to his feet as he spoke. Dawson, in spite of the feeling that swept over him like a dash of cold water, noted that the other man's tone had changed. It was filled with authority, ringing like steel against steel.

"I'm under arrest for what?" he finally sputtered, dropping into a chair.

"For having spurious currency in your possession," repeated Dugan. "Let's see in that drawer."

He strode over and made a brief inspection of the drawer and its contents.

"Just as I expected," he said. "Something like five thousand dollars. You might as well own up, Dawson, you're hooked."

"Man, you're crazy!" shouted Dawson excitedly. "I haven't had that money twenty-four hours! It was paid to me yesterday by a man named Stanton, representing a large automobile concern. The Langley Company; one of the largest in the country. They're going to build a plant here. Employ a large force of men!" He reached a trembling hand for the money on the table as he spoke.

"The Langley Motor Company, eh?" smiled Dugan. "There isn't such a concern in existence. You'll have to frame something better than that."

"I'm not framing anything!" cried Dawson. "I'm telling the truth."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," said Dugan. "The main point is this—you have a large amount of bad bills in your possession and it's my duty to place you under arrest. You will have a chance to explain fully in due time. Can you make bond?" He reached for his hat as he spoke.

Perspiration stood out on Dawson's fore-

head in great beads. Reaching for a handkerchief he mopped his brow, breathing heavily.

"Make bond?" whispered George in a horrified tone. The seriousness of the situation had dawned on him fully. He was panic stricken at the thought of how his predicament might terminate.

"It isn't absolutely necessary that you make bond," said Dugan, and Dawson jumped as though he had touched a live wire. The feeling of relief, however, sank like lead when the officer added:

"You can pay a fine or go to jail."

"I'll never go to jail," said Dawson resolutely. "No one will ever say that George Dawson went to jail for an innocent violation of the law."

"Ignorance excuses no one," Dugan reminded him dryly.

"I know that only too well," flared Dawson, beginning to grow angry. "I'll pay a fine first." He was silent a moment, then repeated, "I'll pay the fine."

"What, with that stuff?" asked the other sarcastically, pointing to the money Dawson had taken from the safe.

The latter shook his head hurriedly. "No, indeed. If that money isn't good I wouldn't think of trying to use it. I have some currency in the other office. Real money. How much will it take? Let's get it over with." He strode nervously up and down the floor as he spoke.

For a moment Dugan did not answer and Dawson felt his hopes rising. "Just say how much, Mr. Dugan," he urged. "I'd rather pay you the money here and now and hush the matter up. Why, I'd be ruined right here in my own home town if it got out that I was arrested for having worthless bills in my possession, where I've lived respectably for years." He choked down an audible sigh.

"Well, Dawson," began the officer, his voice softening at the other's distress, "it certainly would look bad here among your associates. Still, as you know, it's my sworn duty to let the law take its course.

"However, I'm going to make it as easy as possible for you," he continued. "If you prefer to keep the matter as quiet as possible it will be necessary that you pay a

five hundred dollar fine and destroy those counterfeit bills. Is there some one here in Winchester you can trust to keep his mouth closed?"

"But why is it necessary for any one else to know about it?" asked Dawson.

"Simply this," was the reply. "If you pay a fine it's only right that some one witness the transaction."

"That won't be necessary," protested Dawson. "And besides, I don't know of a single person here I can trust in a matter of this kind. I'll just pay you the money and you can leave without any one knowing about the affair."

"Just as you say," said Dugan a bit wearily. "But I'll admit I've never handled a case like this before."

Dawson rose and entered an adjoining room, reappearing shortly with a small box. Placing it on the table he counted out five hundred dollars and shoved the money over to Dugan, who examined each bill carefully. Satisfying himself, he placed the money in his pocket.

"Now, Dawson," he said, "let this be a warning to you. Honesty is the best policy. I've found it out by following my profession fifteen years. I've seen the best of them fall; you can't keep up the pace that kills. Stick in the straight and narrow rut—it'll pay you in the end.

With that he scooped the counterfeit bills into a pile on the glass covered desk and reached for a match. A moment later Dawson saw his dream go up in smoke.

"Yes, sir," said old man Hopkins the following afternoon to his hearers gathered around the stove, "we're certainly livin' in a wonderful age. George left this morning, mad as a wet hen. Said he was going over to Allison and report it to the State authorities. Both of 'em, the little fellow that came first and the fat one that followed, were crooks of the worst kind. An' to think that they pulled the wool over George Dawson's eyes is 'most more than I can believe. The deputy who came through here this morning said George ain't the first one they fooled—they've been working that scheme on a lot of folks in this part of the country."



The Ultimate Husband

By CHESTER PORTER BISSELL

ME and Joe Brinkley cashed in on our royalty at Mexia soon after the liquid insanity gushed over the derrick, and then it was when we found a lot of clauses in our contracts which we were not aware existed. We donated most of it to the public-spirited bank and buckled the remaining three or four thousand apiece in our belts and betook ourselves to the tall and uncut timber where we went into consultation on the immediate future.

"I opine," says Joe, "that each of us having a few thousand of the iron men with a flapper on one side and a buzzard on the other, it behooves us to get a small shack and retire to winter quarters, and see if we can find time to look over the vicissitudes of life as she stands?"

"A well-spoken bunch of nouns and verbs," says I.

Whereupon we proceeded to deposit our passports and credentials in the stronghold of San Rio, where they have a real pretty little sign on the window printed in gold leaf, "Deposits Guaranteed." As all our bills of lading were signed up by the Treasurer of the U. S. A., the main squeeze of the bank

put us down in the big book of general assets. We acquired a few hundred dollars' worth of household implements and general warfare; started a grocery bill and began to pick up the threads of life, which had been lying dormant for some time.

A few days later Joe comes in about the usual time we start in on our hash recipes and domestic science.

"I find the general atmosphere of this town of Rio rather sociable. Have had a confab with the town's foreman of the vigilant committee, and while he demands no past family pedigree nor proofs of birth, he gives me a few pointers as to the future."

"Does he grant us a permit to inhale the wonderful ozone of Texas?" says I, as I removed the husks from some hen fruit and pitched the insides into the hash crucible.

"He do," says Joe. "He explains the status of things in and around these environs, and I find a good many little technical matters which we were not fully conversant with. Do we want citizenship in these diggings with or without the dengue?"

"Do the best people have it?" says I.

"It seems so. It's very popular, so I told

him we would take it and he seemed much pleased. There is another thing: we can take it or leave it alone."

"What's that?"

"The Ku Klux. Seems like everybody around here is in it, so I told him to put down our names in bold-faced type."

"That's right," says I. "We want to be with the bunch—the minority is ones that always gets worked on."

"Another thing I gather from this guy," says Joe. "In order to preserve one hundred per cent American decorum and tranquillity we must be straight Democrats—not the soap tail kind," says Joe, going through his hand baptism prior to wiping some of Rio's soil on our roller towel.

"Does he think we are going to start a Republican paper in Texas to make a living? Here in the *Police Gazette* I see that Vera Chapman, the movie art dodger, is going to take on her sixth matrimonial victim." I spread out the omelette hen fruit and set the coffee urn on the linoleum table cover.

It was about two months later that Joe started flying signals of distress. He had for some time been off his feed, nor did his snoring have its true ring at night. One day I lamped him dressed in his blue serges and patent leathers coming out of a picture show with the widow, Octavia Brown—Octavia, age forty summers. Size on the butter bowl order. Fat! Looked as if she were trying to sit in her own lap. Face pleasant and big dimples and blue eyes. Late husband in the world's war and early on the casualty list as dead. Insurance pending. Said late husband tried to dodge the draft behind her skirt, but it did not work.

Several times Octavia had thrown her weather eye in my direction, giving me a ten-ton look, but I never had let it get in my system. I am just a plain quilted-necked hombre with no fancy embellishments, but when it comes down to women I am acquainted with the broad field of vision on their peculiar attainments. I know all about their lairs, feed, habits, little side steps and odds and ends. Octavia, noting that her tiny love darts had not penetrated my innards or gets me infected, works on Joe and has him feeding out of her hand.

"I don't know how this thing come about," says Joe to me that evening, pulling off his collar and sinking down on the soft side of a soap box. "Octavia says we are engaged and I'll be durned if I ever asked her." Joe looked worried.

"Looks to me like you was about ready to do a turn in the psycho ward. The widow has evidently been apprized of the present worth of your bills of lading and has played the old, old gag on you," says I. "When are your nuptials to be celebrated and are you going to call a preacher or an undertaker?"

I was glad to think we had our "deposits guaranteed" in separate accounts. If there is anything that can play hell with a young and tender bank balance it is to get in close proximity with a seasoned widow looking for new worlds to conquer.

"Help me out of this thing, Silas, old top," says Joe. "I don't need this woman any more than a frog needs two tails. Two days engaged and she is hanging heavy on my hands. What will you give me for her, Silas? Give me that can of tobacco and she is yours." Joe swung his arm with a sweeping gesture.

"If I may speak my mind," says I, "the trouble with you is that you are not only unsophisticated, but you are uncouth. You should have taken a few lessons on female inspiration before you were taken with this jane infirmity—at your age it is generally fatal."

"Was Adam sophisticated?"

"No," says I. "That was where Eve had it all over him."

I could not help but feel sorry for this poor creature of circumstances. Joe was a good fellow and I had known him for years. It was plain that it was my duty to save him.

"Joe," says I, "this is a case of where it not only takes a firm hand, but a delicate one. Now, when it comes to legal advice, I am the flea-bitten gazaboo that can hand you out the right dope."

"Yep, I can see that you don't hate yourself. What's the matter of you taking the widow over?" says Joe.

"I am forty-eight years and still running in the pastures, and still a buckin', and I

don't let any lopsided galoot like you pick my women or try to hand me one that he has got tired of in two days," says I. "There is only one thing for you to do, boy. Run! Stampede! Take a vacation and give this town the absent treatment. I will carry the sad news to Octavia that number two is on the casualty list with no insurance, no assets and no liabilities. Are you on?"

"Put me down on the minutes of this here meeting as replying in the affirmative. I am off for Dallas. Let me know general results and when it is safe to appear on the scene of action," says Joe.

Joe drops off the map and goes to Dallas to take in picture shows, shoot kelly pool and burlesque shows and wear a boiled shirt every day while I engages in the diplomatic art of untangling his matrimonial alliance with Octavia. When it comes to handling women there is no good in mincing words. I always cut thunder to a shaving, so without any ostentatious display I sets out to notify Octavia that her nuptial anticipations with Joe are nil and *hors de combat*.

Octavia met me with a convulsion of smiles. She nearly tore the door from its moorings in getting it open.

"Ah! Mr. Silas Sterling—you need no introduction. Come right in. Mr. Ringo, the banker, and I were only speaking about you the other day, and he, like myself, was favorably impressed with you." She wore one of those cute little flapdoodle, fluffy-duffy lace caps with a lot of ribbon bows cut in and out here and there—you know what I mean? I sat down bemoaning the hard duty that I had to perform. It began to dawn on me that there was a lot of mitigation in Joe being unable to resist her.

But I had a mission to perform and it was hard for me to get started on my speech.

"Octavia," says I, finally. "I am here on a painful errand. Where we bank and build on a foundation of sand we are sure to see our ideals and dreams crumble and fall from their pedestal—"

"Did you break a statue or something," says Octavia seriously.

"It is of human heart strings that I would fain speak, Octavia. The man you relied

on to give your good name is a fake. Instead of being inspired by a pure woman's love and letting his wings feather out to life's real ambition, he has soured and let his worthless spine turn to a whetstone."

"Pardon me," says Octavia, "but I do not understand what you are driving at."

"Can't you see, Octavia? The man who promised to marry you has gone. Joe, that mangy, double-jointed sausage eater, who I have been calling my pardner all these years, has flew the coop."

I wiped the moisture from my brow to let that much sink in, but so far she did not show any symptoms of hysteria or fainting. She gazed at me steady for some time with her big blue eyes.

"I'm very sorry if he has been a disappointment to you, and I know that you will be very lonely," says Octavia, giving me that dangerous ten-ton look that often proves fatal to mankind. "If he promised to marry me I did not know it—we were just good friends, was all." She smiled at me ever so sweetly.

I felt like a wheelbarrow load of bricks had struck me on the liver. Was Joe just kidding me to make a fool out of myself?

"Then you and Joe were not engaged?" says I.

"Goodness, no! Gracious, the very idea!" She laughed one of those little laughs that sounds like a cuckoo clock, and came over and sat down next to me on the sofa. "As I said, Joe and me were just friends, but I was in hopes, through him, I could get acquainted with you." She sort of reddened up a little; I suppose it was her natural color as she did not seem that way at first.

Octavia did not look so bad. She was just cute plump, kinder like a nice English plum pudding. Her house was a cozy little affair full of cushions, polished cow horns and comfort. There was nice rocking chairs, a soft plush carpet and a phonograph, and I began contrasting everything to our old camp shack—it's funny what a lot of odds and ends a fellow can think up in a few seconds. I'll swear, without seeming to move Octavia had got up real close to me on the sofa. I don't see how she done it, but she did.

She looked in my face like she was going to cry, and, gosh, if there is anything that gets my goat, it is for a woman to start the sob stuff. Then I begin feeling sorry for myself, and when a fellow starts that there is not much hope for him.

"Are you lonesome, little magnolia bud?" says I, patting one of her soft little lunch hooks.

"Yes, big boy—we were meant for each other." She puts her arms around me, and the lights went out, soft music, and a close up before life's camera.

I don't know what all I said, but I remember sitting there holding her in my arms, looking into the future, and not a thought of Joe, only that I was glad he was out of the way.

The next few days I spent most of my time at Octavia's. The whole neighborhood seemed to know about it. We figured with what I had at the bank, with her house, and what she would get from the U. S. A. on the insurance, we could sit pretty keen—yes, we would even have a flivver.

One morning in blows Joe from Dallas. Joe has that disposition, if he was rescued from hell and taken to heaven he would quit it and go back to hell to see how they were all getting along since he left. He was about as welcome to me as a prohibition officer would be in a Detroit cabaret.

"What ho!" says Joe. "Sorter got tired of waiting for written instructions. Couldn't stay any longer. Sort of had a change of heart since I been thinking it over and seeing the drab and seamy life in the big city. On mature thought, I think I will take Octavia. Not a bad little girl, don't you think?"

Joe was pulling off his patent gaiters.

I begin to wonder how many years a fellow would get in Texas for manslaughter in the first degree.

"Take her?" says I. "How are you going to take her? With or without sugar, paid or have her charged, and do you want her done up in a paper sack?"

Joe did not seem to care for sarcasm.

"Oh, I know you are sore, but in a love affair one cannot see everything in a minute. I have concluded that Octavia aver-

ages up fairly well, and with a bird like me at my age and never took any prizes in a beauty show, he can't hope to have any Venuses going batty over him."

"Joe, you left a quit claim deed with me a few days ago, waiving all rights to Octavia," says I; "and you gave me a verbal power of attorney to settle up the matrimonial estate and keep you out of a breach of promise suit. I have cleared things up for you. I give you notice now that I have filed on Octavia, and all I want to do now is to prove up and get a clear abstract and title. The case was decided in my favor by you letting the suit go by default."

Joe regarded me quite a while and took long puffs from his pipe. I could see it was not sitting well with him.

"Mr. Sterling, when your parent buzzard pipped your shell and you were liberated into this world the Almighty was short on rattlesnakes, and it was your mission and errand to mingle among them and improve the breed. Long ago I gave up the idea of handing you a dose of strychnine, as I was fully aware the deadly venom in your system would counteract any amount of poison taken, and you would simply fatten on it."

"And," says I, "if I had my choice for society between you and ten sacks of fertilizer, one end of this shack would now be giving forth a stable fragrance of commercial worth instead of the skunk atmosphere that floats to my olfactory nerves from your worthless carcass. What you lack in intellectual balast is made up by ponderous gall."

"When it comes to intellectual rating, Mr. Sterling," says Joe, "you lack a devil of a lot of having your tonnage. They tell me that fish develops the brain; in that case your set is so under average that I advise you to try the contents of the Atlantic Ocean—if that will be enough."

"Thanks," says I. "If stewed okra was slipping over Niagara Falls instead of water, and falling in dishpans, the sound would be more soothing to me than your general mushy conversation at all times."

We goes on this way for several hours, and stops from sheer exhaustion. Then we sits and glares at each other for a long

time. If looks could kill we would both have been dead.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," says I at last. "We will both go before Octavia, and let her pick her man."

"Fair enough," says Joe. "Let's go."

He pulls on his patent leathers, and we goes down to the widow's without speaking a word.

Octavia receives us with that cool, sweet, unruffled calm.

Joe looked like a bulldog training for a prize fight, and I had that look that goes with confidence. Octavia gave us both chairs.

"Gentlemen, you will excuse me for a short time. Mr. Ringo, the banker, is here on some business. I will be back in a few moments," says Octavia with a smile for each of us, and she hikes into the dining room where this Ringo guy is holding some sort of session.

We hear a low buzz from Ringo. Joe and I were in no mood for a love fest, so the absence of talk in our department was almost painful. Ringo was telling Octavia how to get her insurance for the dead soldier. He would advise her as regards investments; and every once in a while we could hear something about safeguarding her interests. Then there would be one of them ominous silences, and Joe was having a time keeping his legs crossed.

Pretty soon this Ringo bird gathers up his papers, and in they come; and would you believe it, sir, Octavia carried his hat and was leaning on his arm and blushing—or was it the kind that comes in boxes? I'll be darned if I know. I gave it up. She was leaning on that guy as if she was just getting over a bad case of dengue fever. Ringo gave us that sort of smile which means anything from petty larceny to murder in the first degree.

"I am glad to meet you gentlemen, and I take pleasure in presenting to you my

future wife. We are to be married in a very few days," he says, throwing out his chest.

"Unless some one else comes along with a better rating," blurts out Joe.

Joe was about as diplomatic as a hog.

"We heard of it," says I, "and came over to offer congratulations. Our florist is now making up an elaborate bride's bouquet of orange blossoms for the happy day."

I can be a cheerful liar if the occasion demands.

"So good of you both," gurgles Octavia. "We do hope you will be at our wedding."

Me and Joe eased out of that joint some way. I felt like I had been sent for and could not come, and Joe now and then laughs one of them hellish sardonic laughs. He stops at the store and buys me a good cigar, which I takes it to mean we have buried the hatchet. Going to the shack, we meet the depot agent. He is carrying a telegram, and when he sees us he stops and begins to laugh.

"Who's it with Octavia this week?" says he.

"Ringo. He tagged us and then touched wood, and he's it," says I.

"Meaning he touched her head," said Joe.

"Read this," says the agent, handing us the telegram. "Ain't war hell?"

Washington, D. C.

OCTAVIA BROWN,
San Rio, Texas:

We find the casualty list in error. Private Brown is not dead, but alive and on his way home. There will be no insurance.

(Signed) CHIEF CLERK INSURANCE DEP'T.

A few hours later Joe says:

"Hand me that *Police Gazette*; I'll read that article on Vera Chapman taking on her sixth husband. What are you reading?"

"It's a little thing by Kipling entitled: 'A Fool There Was,'" says I.

"Even as you and I," says Joe.



OUT OF THE SKY

Our next week's Novelette by JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE will well repay the attention of the reader. It's a graphic tale of everyday life along unusual lines.



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